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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE PREPARATORY STUDENTS AT RED DEER COLLEGE

BY

© THOMAS H. GWIN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER, AND

TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER, AND TECHNOLOGY
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SPRING 1994

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE PREPARATORY STUDENTS AT RED DEER COLLEGE submitted by THOMAS H. GWIN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

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Date: April 6, 1994

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of
my father, Colonel "Tiny" Gwin (1905-1958),
and to my mother, Florence Gwin,
who kept telling me to "get an education."

ABSTRACT

The view of adults as autonomous individuals who prefer self-directedness in their learning has long been advocated by Malcolm Knowles and other supporters of andragogy. However, others, including Stephen Brookfield, feel that many adults enter formal learning dependent on the instructor, either unable or unwilling to design their own learning activities. This study attempted to test the andragogical assumptions about adult learners at the college preparatory level.

Data were collected using both a questionnaire and focus group method. Ninety-five questionnaires were administered to full-time students new to the College Preparatory Program to gather demographic and attitudinal information, and to establish the degree of similarity between the general new student population and focus group participants. The focus group interviews obtained participants' perceptions of themselves as learners, the institution, and instructional techniques over a 13-week term. A group of 10-12 new students was created from each of a basic, intermediate, and senior level of the program (n=33). Participants were nearly evenly distributed between genders, and ranged from ages 20 to 50 years. The three groups were interviewed at the beginning, middle, and end of the term, using the same four questions at the beginning and end of the term in a pre- and post-test design. The three groups were compared against each other, and each group compared to itself over the term.

The study describes the initial stressors, preferred instructional techniques, and beneficial services and information from the students' perspective. As the term progressed, students reported that stress was replaced to some extent by increased self-confidence, self-reliance, and objectivity. Students consistently reported a preference for active learning techniques, and described other helpful instructional techniques and instructor characteristics.

The study found that Canadian college preparatory students are not self-directed, according to Knowles' criteria, citing lack of knowledge and time. These findings concur with the situational dependency view described by Pratt (1988), and Merriam and Caffarella (1991). However, participants exhibited some traits which indicate the potential for self-directedness in a different instructional milieu.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The literature in adult education lacks consensus in regard to the degree of self-directedness of adult learners. Although theory postulates that adults have a tendency to move from dependence to independence, and have a deep need for autonomy (Knowles, 1980), some writers suggest that independence and autonomy are situationally determined (Pratt, 1988). Learners usually begin a learning experience in a dependent mode, and may move toward independence as their familiarity with the environment and the content increases. However, instructors often plan courses well in advance of their delivery, choosing instructional techniques on considerations of content rather than of learners. Instructors also tend to see learners as they first appeared, rather than as the more independent learners they may have become, and continue to employ instructional techniques which hinder growth toward independence. Information regarding the levels of learner dependence or independence would be useful to guide instructional design choices.

Student attrition at the college preparatory level is an important issue for adult educators, as well. Adult learners at the college preparatory level, although autonomous in many aspects of their lives, are unsophisticated learners in the academic realm. Students in ABE/GED programs are prone to withdrawal or failure at rates reaching in excess of 60 percent in American programs (Quigley, 1992; Merriam, 1988); the Canadian experience is often quite similar. The College Preparation Program at Red Deer College, for example, reported a combined withdrawal and failure rate of approximately 30 percent in the 1993 academic year. Information regarding students' perceptions as they enter and progress through a college upgrading program may be of assistance in helping institutions facilitate student learning, persistence, and success.

The College Preparatory Program at Red Deer College completed a comprehensive program review in June, 1990, which pointed to a number of the department's strengths in the provision of education services for adults. The program review was conducted as a matter of college policy and followed a format required by that policy; however, the review steering committee initially wanted to use some other method to obtain data not provided by the prescribed method. The need for further information was supported by the external review committee:

> Since a less traditional program review may gain better information from former and potential students, College Preparatory Program should identify priorities for small, focused research projects which would gather data about College Preparatory students. These projects might take the form of focus groups and case studies. (Storvik, Paradis, Weir, Jeske, Gwin, 1990, p. C-1)

This study would provide some experience with an alternate method of inquiry.

The external evaluators further recommended that the College Preparatory Program "develop a statement of its philosophy in regard to adult learning . . . to assist CPP in the incorporation of adult education techniques" (Storvik et al., 1990, p. 6). This study would benefit CPP in articulating its policy regarding adult learners by providing a clearer idea of student experiences and needs.

Statement of Research Problem

The research problem posed in this study is as follows:
What are the perceptions of freshman college preparatory students regarding themselves, the college, instructional techniques, and effective instruction as they experience their first term of the College Preparatory Program at Red Deer College?
The problem was addressed by answering the following questions:

1. What are student perceptions about themselves as learners as the term progresses?
2. What are student perceptions about the college as the term progresses?
3. What are student expectations and preferences regarding instructional techniques?
4. Do student preferences for instructional techniques change over the term?

5. To what extent do student perceptions reflect dependent or independent attitudes toward their studies?

Definitions

This thesis will try to avoid jargon; however, some terms should be defined to clarify meaning and the context of the study. The list below presents terminology and abbreviations used in this thesis discussion.

College Preparatory Program: A formal program of high school preparatory and high school equivalency courses offered at Red Deer College "to provide life enrichment, a High School Equivalency Diploma or upgrading for entry into specific trade, commercial, technical, college or university programs" (Storvik et al., 1990, p. 16).

Focus group: A group of seven to ten people, previously unknown to each other, who have been called together to discuss a topic about which they share a common interest (Krueger, 1988, p. 18).

Full-time student: A student enrolled in at least two CPP courses.

Instructional techniques: The approach employed to accomplish the learning task, such as lecture, small group activity, role play (Verner, 1964).

Nominal Group Technique (NGT): A group process developed by Andre Delbecq and Andrew Van de Ven, summarized briefly as follows. Group members first record their own responses to a nominal question in silence. In round-robin fashion and without discussion, participants record one idea at a time for others to read until all ideas are presented. Each point is then discussed for members to understand and evaluate. Each member then privately rank orders each point; the sum of individual rankings is the group's decision. (Delbecq and Van de Ven, 1975)

Non-traditional-age student: One who has returned to formal education after several years away; usually 24 years of age or more.

Part-time student: A student enrolled in only one CPP course.

Traditional-age student: One who has an uninterrupted sequence of formal education, other than short departures; usually between 18-24 years of age.

Abbreviations Used in This Study

CPP: College Preparatory Program
ESL: English as a second language
RDC: Red Deer College
SES: Socioeconomic status

Significance of the Study

The principles of adult education, as described by Knowles (1980), indicate a preference by learners for an active role in the learning process, a preference which distinguishes adult learners from traditional age learners. However, little information is available about Canadian students' learning methodology preferences and willingness to participate in active instructional techniques at the college preparatory level. This study provides some insight into student preferences in this area, and how these preferences change as a result of experience in the program.

Jerrold Apps (1979) comments on the need to treat adult students differently from traditional age students. Although Apps is referring to a higher education context in his writing, much of what he says is applicable to students at the college preparatory level, who are also non-traditional-age students. Many college preparatory students face the same demands on their time and must deal with the same constraints and fears as the non-traditional higher education students Apps describes; therefore, non-traditional-age students should be treated differently. At the same time, adult learners bring to the learning environment a rich reservoir of experience and knowledge not possessed by traditional-age students. This study provides some insight into the ways college preparatory students could be treated.

One way to learn how adult learners should be treated is simply to ask them about their preferences. Education literature reveals many cases in which qualitative studies have been employed to gather information about the learning experience from the perspective of the learner. "Qualitative research strives to understand, as Patton (1985) points out, 'what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting" (cited in Merriam, 1988). According to Brookfield (1990)

> there has been a growing interest among many educational researchers in recording learners' direct perceptions of their learning experiences. . . . Many researchers have decided that it is just as important to study learning from the learner's viewpoint as it is to study how teachers view their students' learning. (36)

This study adds to the body of knowledge about students' perceptions of their learning, but does so at the college preparatory level.

The information gathered as part of this study may also have some implications for methods to reduce student attrition. Low levels of educational attainment and student attrition are national issues because of the resultant productivity loss at a time when work force demographics demonstrate a current and future shortage of well-trained, well-educated workers. The federal and provincial governments' view is that upgrading the education of women, youth, visible minorities, and the handicapped is one way to address the work force shortage.

College preparatory programs such as that at Red Deer College can play a role in upgrading the work force. The College Preparatory Program at RDC, like other basic education or upgrading programs, accepts "at risk" students and therefore runs a higher chance of losing these students. Reasons for the higher risk include a student profile of academic failure, lack of motivation, poor study habits, lack of perseverance, low self-esteem, and so forth (Storvik et al., 1990, p. 61). One way to address the problem of student dropout is through an instructional delivery design which considers the needs and preferences of adult students.

In many cases the instructional approach in adult upgrading programs is a repetition of the traditional classroom methods which many learners, who "dropped out," found to be unsuccessful in their first educational experience. Also, as mentioned earlier, adult students should be treated differently because of the greater demands upon their time, their greater life experience, and higher levels of motivation. While the College Preparatory Program is recognized as providing high quality instruction for adults, the program review also found a tendency on the part of instructors to use lectures as the primary instructional method and recommended "CPP should investigate ways in which alternate teaching strategies could be adopted" (Storvik, Paradis, Weir, Jeske, Gwin, 1990, p. 65). This study attempts to describe alternative approaches by seeking the students' own preferences regarding the manner in which their education may be designed and presented. Such information may help the College Preparatory Program in particular, and adult education programs in general, create a more positive, varied learning environment for students and inculcate in students a more positive attitude toward their educational experience.

Attrition has recently become an acute issue for Alberta college administrators as well as instructors. The per capita funding grant, as of July 1, 1991, is based on enrolment figures at the end of the academic term rather than on the mid-term enrolment count, as was previously the case. As well, budget reductions instituted by the Klein government bring increased emphasis on cost-effectiveness and accountability in postsecondary education. At Red Deer College, the College Preparatory Program serves about 475 full-time equivalent students per term (550 to 600 learners), of which approximately 70 percent continue on to further education. Reducing student attrition would therefore increase cost-effectiveness in support of both pre-college upgrading programs and postsecondary education.

Much information about the student body at the college preparatory level is based on application of generalized, theoretical concepts. This study provides a time-specific and place-specific reality test of these assumptions. This information in turn may help the program to more clearly articulate its philosophy and policies regarding adult learners. Such information may have implications for the CPP student orientation program and for professional development thrusts within the department.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to full-time freshman college preparatory students at Red Deer College who registered in the Winter 1992 term beginning in January, 1992. Students enrolled part-time or registered in the department of General Studies are not included, even though they may be enrolled in CPP courses. The study is a short-term study of the learning experiences of adult upgrading students; it does not take into account any evolution in student awareness beyond the time span of the study. The nature of this study does not permit generalization to other colleges or programs, according to the usual interpretations of generalization, but may be applicable in what Merriam (1988) terms "naturalistic generalization" or "reader or user generalization" (pp. 176-77).

This study does not attempt to discover the effectiveness of any one method of instruction, but seeks to learn student preferences for instructional techniques.

Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative study using somewhat large focus groups of college preparatory students, this thesis faces a number of limitations related to the design of the study and the skill level of the researcher. These limitations include the following items.

1. The study does not take into account student pre-enrolment characteristics such as SES, parents' educational level, or learning style as an effect on student preferences.
2. College preparatory students are not necessarily "expert consumers" of educational services; their responses may be based upon a limited perception of the college environment, their learning needs, and the scope of possible instructional techniques.

3 College preparatory students may have difficulty in articulating their preferences.
4. Since the researcher is the "prime instrument" for data collection, his degree of skill as an interviewer, his values, philosophical orientation, and interaction with subjects will have some effect on the data collection and analysis.
5. The presence of recording devices, although designed to be non-intrusive, may have an influence on the degree and nature of respondents' revelations.
6. This study employs a semi-structured interview approach, which directs attention to a selected range of topics and therefore exerts some restrictions on amount of available data.
7. The nature of group dynamics affects the data by drawing out and expanding some types of information and inhibiting other types.
8. Participants in the focus groups are volunteers and may not be typical students with typical perceptions.

Assumptions

1. Although measures were taken to establish trust and rapport with the participants, the degree of success in this endeavor is uncertain. For purposes of this study, the researcher assumed students were honest and forthright in their responses to the interview questions.
2. Although students at the college preparatory level may not be "expert consumers" of educational services, their previous formal education, experience in the college program, and life experience will have given them some background upon which to base their preferences.

Validity

According to Merriam (1980), validity of qualitative research can be enhanced through an explanation of the researcher's position, use of triangulation, and creation of an audit trail (pp. 172-173). For this study, each interview began with a discussion of the purpose of the study. As a means of enhancing the validity of the study, students were provided with an oral summary of their statements, which they were invited to revise, at the close of each topic during the interview. In this manner, the interviewer's accuracy in summarizing the discussion was checked with participants.

As a form of triangulation, students were asked to keep a learning journal, such as that suggested by Brookfield (1990), to record their experiences and observations on a biweekly basis over the term. The journals, a copy of which is included in Appendix F, were to serve as a personal check and review of the evolution of the student's thoughts. The questions in the journals were used to structure the second round of interviews. Students in each group were asked to privately review the comments they made in their journals in preparation for group discussions. Such review should enhance the expression of individual perceptions during the interview to counter the tendency for participants to agree with a strongly voiced viewpoint or group consensus.

Student permission was obtained to use the journals as additional data for the study. The time allocated for the interviews may not have permitted all an opportunity to voice their thoughts, or individuals may be hesitant to do so during the interview. A review of the journals consequently would have provided additional information as well as substantiated the content of the discussion. However, too few participants maintained the journal over the term to justify their use as an additional data source.

Students were also given an opportunity to have a final say regarding their perceptions of the topics discussed over the term. These perceptions were to be submitted to the researcher in written form by the end of May for inclusion in the thesis. No written submissions were submitted, however, so the main source of data is the series of group interviews.

External Validity

External validity can be established through a member check, by provision of a "thick" description, and by establishing how typical the particular case is (Merriam, 1988, p. 177). The interviews included member checks after each discussion item; the thesis provides this "thick" description as part of the presentation of findings, and the demographic questionnaire helps to establish the typical nature of the study group in relation to the cohort of freshman CPP students. These techniques were employed to establish internal and external validity.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines background information regarding adult learning theory and its impact on instructional techniques in adult education; as well, it provides a theoretical basis for the research methods employed in the study. This discussion does not attempt to define adult education or discuss the controversies in the field, but rather selects sources which develop topics pertinent to the research question.

Andragogy and Pedagogy in Adult Education

Learning theory in adult education draws from the various schools of general education, such as Skinner's behavioristic approach to learning, Piaget's cognitive theory, and the humanistic approach developed by Rogers and Maslow (Tennant, 1991). These theories were initially applied in the education of children, and adapted or simply applied to adult education as well. In particular, the humanistic school provides terminology for describing the relationship of teacher to learner as that of "learning facilitator." Carl Rogers (1983), a central figure in humanistic psychology, states that a facilitator should be real and genuine, one who accepts the learner and demonstrates empathy and understanding of the learner's reality.

This view is further developed by Malcolm Knowles, one of the most influential writers in the area of adult learning. Knowles (1980) popularized the term "andragogy" in North America and proposed its definition as "the art and science of helping adults learn" in contrast to pedagogy, which he described as "the art and science of teaching children" (p. 43). According to Knowles, andragogy is premised upon the following four assumptions about the characteristics of learners which distinguish andragogy from pedagogy:

1. as adults mature, their self concept moves from dependence to self-direction;
2. adults accumulate a "reservoir of experience" which may be drawn upon as a resource for learning;

3. adults' readiness to learn becomes linked to developmental tasks of adult life;
4. learners move away from future application of learning to one of immediate application, with a corresponding move away from being subject-centred to being performance-centred. (p. 45)

Initially Knowles (1980) felt andragogy was distinctly different from pedagogy, but he later revised this view to state that the two were not "dichotomous," but "two ends of a spectrum, with a realistic assumption in a given situation falling between the two ends" (p. 43). Although Knowles allowed that learners may benefit from andragogical practice in some circumstances, and from pedagogical practice in others, he cautions that the confirmed pedagogue will cling to methods not conducive, and perhaps damaging, to the adult's learning. The most persistent aspect of Knowles' andragogical theory is the assumption that adults move towards self-directedness, an assumption which implies an active role for the learner in designing his or her learning activities. The pedagogical model, according to Knowles, implies a passive approach to learning; the learner sits back and expects the teacher to do all the instructional preparation and lecturing. The andragogical approach, on the other hand, would involve learners in diagnosing learning needs, in planning their educational program, and in conducting and evaluating learning experiences. The instructor serves as a resource person and "coinquirer" (pp. 46-49). The implications for the adult education practitioner are considerable. The application of self-directed learning, according to Boud (1987) is most appropriate when the learner can identify and express learning needs, and the necessary resources are available (p. 225), conditions most often met in formal education settings.

The assumptions of adult learning proposed by Knowles have led to extensive debate among adult educators, much of it carried out in the *Adult Education Quarterly*. As Sharan B. Merriam (1987) has noted, andragogy "has caused more controversy, philosophical debate, and critical analysis than any other concept/theory/model proposed thus far" (p. 190). One aspect of this controversy relates to the degree of learner self-directedness. Two sides of this controversy are presented by adherents to the andragogical model and by those who question it, one of the most notable being Stephen Brookfield.

Knowles' *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1980) is one of the most widely cited books in adult education (Pratt, 1988). In it Knowles discusses at length his revised view of andragogy and reaffirms the importance of self-directedness and its implications for practice. Tough (1988) states that the data show up to ninety percent of people usually are self-directed in their learning, and that when learners are encouraged to set their own goals, considerable energy and excitement are released. Other proponents of self-directedness support Knowles by pointing out that this method of study has been around for ages (Caffarella and O'Donnell, 1987; Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). For example, Benne (1955, p. 41) gives a three-point rationale for having students involved in the planning process which is much like Knowles' view:

> (1) decisions and actions are enriched by the knowledge, insight, and imagination of many people; (2) the plans made are more likely to meet all the varied needs of the people involved and to fit the unique features of the situation; and (3) because each person plays a part in making decisions, he is more concerned and more interested. (cited in Rosenblum and Darkenwald, 1983, p. 147)

The authors go on to conclude that learner participation in program planning leads to greater learning and satisfaction than occurs in the absence of such participation. So entrenched in adult education is the principle of self-direction that Rosenblum and Darkenwald (1983) describe it as a "cardinal" and "venerable" principle (p. 147). However, Brookfield (1992) includes self-direction in his discussion of what he calls five "myths" of adult learning. These myths, he charges, are nearly beyond challenge by practitioners for fear of appearing "deviant" to the field of adult education (p. 12).

In summary, andragogy advocates argue that the long history of learner self-direction and its widespread acceptance support a philosophy and methodology which involve learners in planning and carrying out learning activities.

On the other hand, Brookfield and others (including Elias, 1979; Thompson, 1989) present a body of theory and research which challenges the andragogical assumption of learner self-direction. As Brookfield (1990) says, "Claims that adults are innately self-directed, or inherently critical thinkers, cannot be empirically supported" (p. 13). He questions the dichotomy between andragogy and pedago,gy, stating that the difference is more one of degree than of kind. Another criticism is that studies of adult self-directedness have been conducted with primarily middle class populations in North America and Great Britain; its presence in other populations is undetermined (Caffarella and O'Donnell, 1987).

Brookfield (1985) distinguishes between adult education, an activity which attempts to provide learners with a sense of control, and adult training, in which predetermined skills or knowledge are acquired by learners via methods determined by the trainer (p. 46). Adult education thus carries with it an element of critical consciousness, which may not occur in learner-designed activities, for the learner may be operating from a limited experiential or theoretical base. Learner self-direction, therefore, may run counter to the "critical consciousness" philosophical orientation of adult education. In his examination of the five myths of adult education, Brookfield (1992) states that adult learners feel their instructors are shirking their professional responsibility in asking learners to create their own learning activity, a task learners may be ill-prepared to perform. In addition, the absence of professional guidance may leave learners without a reliable measure of learning performance. Self-direction also deprives educators of an active role in the learning activity, and raises the issue of professional ethics. Learners' perceptions of their learning needs, and educators' perceptions of learning needs often differ. Should educators withhold challenges to the learner's perceptions of educational quality or efficacy and simply act as technicians?

An adult educator acting as a pure andragogue would expect learners to be self-directing in managing the elements of a learning project; however, not all adult learners are capable of being self-directed learners, or they may not wish to plan their own learning experience. Boud (1987) points out that adults returning from a lengthy separation from formal learning may first want to prove that they are capable of studying again, a need which surpasses acquiring content knowledge. Guglielmino (1977), creator of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS), lists the following attributes as indicative of a readiness for self-directed learning: "openness to learning, self-concept as an effective learner, initiative and independence in learning, informed acceptance of responsibility, love of learning, creativity, future orientation, and the ability to use basic study and problem-solving skills" (cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, p. 216). Adult students beginning a learning activity may not feel they possess such attributes.

Pratt (1988) argues that adult educators should recognize both learner independence and dependence, as indicated by the learning context and learner readiness. When the learner possesses the necessary knowledge and desire to design a learning project, the educator may collaborate as a coinquirer and learning facilitator, helping the learner toward greater autonomy. In many circumstances, however, the learner may be either unprepared or unwilling to be self-directing. In adult basic education, for example, or in areas where the learner has little prior knowledge, self-direction may be both frustrating and unproductive for the learner. In addition, where external criteria are established for certification or diploma requirements, or where time constraints or class size are factors, self-direction may not be possible or feasible (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). In their desire for a direct, efficient means to attain an educational objective, learners may quite willingly relinquish the planning role, but this does not mean they are less adult in their approach. Pratt (1988) points out that ability and desire for self-directedness may shift with topic and even within stages of a learning activity; the adult educator should be aware of such situationally-determined dependence rather than expect consistent independence.

In some respects, Knowles' revised view of andragogy appears to accept a situationally-determined state of learner independence as advocated by Brookfield and others. A difference exists between the two groups, though, in the degree to which educators of adults tolerate or anticipate learner dependence, with Knowles biased against pedagogical practice (Thompson, 1989).

Teaching Style and Adult Learning

Teaching style is defined by Fischer and Fischer (1979) as "a pervasive quality of teaching behavior that persists even though the content that is being taught may change" (cited in Conti, 1985, p. 221). The importance of teaching style is indicated by Knowles' (1980) assertion that the "behavior of the teacher probably influences the character of the learning climate more than any other single factor" (p. 47). What are the implications for practice of an andragogical approach in teaching adults?

According to Knowles (1980), an andragogical approach involves the learner in the phases of identifying learning needs, designing the learning activity, establishing learning resources, and conducting and evaluating the learning activity. This process is learner-centred to a degree not implied by the popular usage of the term. Not only are additional demands placed upon the learner, but the traditional teacher role also is affected. The teacher should adopt a facilitator role, rather than the controlling and directing role of the teacher-centred approach. This shift requires a considerable attitude adjustment by both learner and teacher, who have been conditioned by the pedagogical methods of the public school. Both learner and teacher would benefit from some training in how to adjust to and benefit from these new roles.

As mentioned earlier, one assumption in andragogy is that collaboration between learner and adult educator leads to greater learning and satisfaction. A study by Rosenblum and Darkenwald (1983), however, indicated that "participation in planning had no direct effects" (p. 152). The proposition that participation in planning leads to a better planned course and improved learner satisfaction was not supported nor discredited. On the other hand, a study conducted by Beder and Carrea (1988) found that attendance was statistically significantly higher in adult education classes conducted using andragogical methods, but the andragogical training provided to instructors had no significant impact on the learners' evaluation of instruction.

Three studies conducted by Conti (1985, 1989) indicate that either a pedagogical or andragogical approach to adult learning is effective, as long as the approach is consistent. A 1985 study, conducted with ABE and ESL students, found highest gains among students in the most teacher-centred classes, and poorest student achievement in classes taught with greatest adherence to the principles of adult education. The rationale offered for this contrast to expected outcomes is that students' high goal orientation, in this case passing a GED examination, is best served by providing a highly structured learning environment. A second study conducted in 1986 with allied health professionals in non-traditional formats found that learners in either a teacher-centred class or a learner-centred class performed above average (Conti, 1989). The third study, in 1988, again showed that learners in classes rated by the researchers as Very High in either a teacher-centred or learner-centred approach was associated with above-average learner performance. In attempting to reconcile these findings, the researchers determined that consistency in instructional approach enabled learners to predict the instructors' behaviors and to meet course expectations. Interestingly, students did not achieve well with instructors who rated Extremely High in either approach, from which the researchers inferred instructors were not meeting learners' needs for flexibility on one hand, or for structure on the other (Conti, 1989).

Self-directedness may be such a departure from the traditional and expected learning approach that learners find its implementation a disorientating experience. While one might expect unsophisticated learners to benefit from a structured environment, even veteran students can be unsettled by a requirement for self-directedness. For example, a study of graduate students conducted by Taylor (1987) revealed that "participation . . . where people were expected to take primary responsibility for their own learning created shock, confusion, and ambivalence" (p. 180). In this study, the graduate students were educators, social workers, librarians, nutritionists, and counsellors with extensive education and experience, who had willingly taken a course noted for its use of self-directed learning. Although these learners worked through the initial disorientation to some form of reorientation and equilibrium, less sophisticated learners may not fare as well.

This body of literature suggests that either self-directed or instructor-directed learning has application for adult learners, but that self-directed learning is best suited to those possessing appropriate traits. When one includes the consideration that most adult education practitioners have been trained in the pedagogical approach, self-directedness as a teaching style becomes an ethical and professional dilemma.

Appropriate Instructional Techniques in Adult Education

Although educators may disagree on a philosophical orientation in adult education, there is some agreement that a variety of instructional techniques should be employed in teaching adults. Brundage and Mackeracher (1980), in their synthesis of 158 adult education references, state that the literature indicates there are "three basic modes for teaching: directing [another term for training], facilitating, and collaborating" (p. 57), which instructors use as the context, materials, and learners indicate. They cite considerable literature in support of the directing mode when learners prefer a dependent learning method, at the beginning of a new program or when encountering new material. The authors go on to state that learning behaviors tend to change with increased familiarity with the program or content, and conclude there is no "one best teaching style" which works with adult learners (p. 60-61). This conclusion agrees with their earlier assumption that child and adult learning, since the biological structures are similar, may also be similar in mental and physiological processes (p. 11). Apps (1981), Brookfield (1990), and Heimstra and Sisco (1990) agree on the need for a variety of instructional techniques. Apps, writing about adults returning to higher education, devotes a chapter to discussing various individual and group instructional formats designed to help adults acquire content knowledge and to develop analytical, communication, and problem-solving skills. Brookfield states that "critically responsive teachers are not tied to some predetermined methodological stance" but show a willingness to "adapt . . . methods, approaches, and content to the contexts in which they are working" (p. 25). Heimstra and Sisco admit that using a variety of techniques runs counter to having learners undertake personal responsibility for their learning, but feel that providing more choices gives learners greater control. Knowles (1980) presents two tables of instructional techniques with the intent of assisting educators to match instructional technique to educational purpose (p. 239-240).

In summary, the literature indicates that adults may be either dependent or independent learners depending on the type and stage of the learning activity, and that adult educators should employ a variety of techniques to assist adult learning. There is some evidence that dependent learners, such as those often encountered in academic upgrading classes, would benefit from a teacher-centered learning activity, at least at the beginning of their learning activity.

Exemplary Instructor Characteristics

Turning to a consideration of the central figure in establishing classroom dynamics, the instructor, what instructor characteristics do adult learners identify as beneficial to their learning?

Rogers (1983) describes a successful facilitator's attributes as "realness or genuineness" ; "prizing, acceptance, and trust" ; and "empathic understanding" (p. 121-123). Literature describing adult students' preferences provides a more concrete list. Alciatore and Alciatore (1979), in a study of 1,593 college seniors, found that older students [above 25 years] gave high ratings to those instructors who showed an interest in their students, who had a "good personality," were interested in the subject matter, possessed an ability to make the subject interesting, and were objective in both presenting subject matter and in dealing with students (cited in Lloyd and Pena, 1988, p. 265). Lloyd and Pena also cite a study of undergraduates by Keller and Switzner (1983) which found that students above age 25 years identified an instructor's disposition (such as character and personality) and communication skill as qualities of the "best teacher" they ever had. However, in their own survey of 188 undergraduates older than 25 years, Lloyd and Pena found that clarity of presentations and clear organization of course content were ranked highest, followed by teacher-student relationships and an instructor's personal characteristics. Instructors' attitudes toward students ranked lowest. Their conclusion was that the adult student's high motivation to learn explained the high number of responses related to the desirability of an instructor's task orientation, with secondary consideration given to personality and rapport. These last findings contrast with the generally accepted view that older students are more concerned with the affective side of learning, placing more emphasis on the relationship between instructor and learner than on task orientation. This affective aspect is pointed out by Apps (1981) in his survey of humanistic psychology literature, which closely agrees with Rogers' view. Apps developed eight characteristics of exemplary instructors of adult learners which include a concern for the learner as a person, mastery of discipline knowledge and its relationship to society, confidence and competence in instructional skill, uncontrived classroom manner, and an ability to both support and challenge learners (pp. 112-114).

Each of the studies cited above were conducted with adult college students, however, rather than with college preparatory students. Students' perceptions of effective instruction at the college preparatory level are less evident in the literature.

Qualitative Research

Traditionally, quantitative research, with its reliance on statistical data, has been recognized as the most widely employed and valid research method. However, qualitative methods have become increasingly accepted, particularly in adult education. "Qualitative research is a generic term which has come to be used to describe a family of approaches such as hermeneutic enquiry, phenomenological enquiry, ethnographic research and various kinds of field research" (Davie, 1987, p. 197). Quantitative research is based on the belief in an independent reality which can be discovered and described, and which attempts to isolate and control variables in a classic experimental design. Qualitative research operates on the assumption that reality is a construct of the observer's mind and is thus shaped by the values and world view of the observer. Phenomena, therefore, cannot be separated from the context within which they were observed and interpreted (Davie, 1987).

Qualitative research has been involved in significant social science research, including Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Piaget's cognitive development theory, and Kubler-Ross's stages of death and dying (Merriam, 1989). In adult education, Houle's typology of adult learners and Tough's work on self-directed learning were the result of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 1989). Although initially questioned as a valid and reliable methodology, qualitative research is now well-accepted and widely practiced. In fact, the two approaches are often used as complementary techniques. Qualitative methods may be used to shape questionnaires or surveys used in quantitative research, or to develop theories later tested by quantitative means.

Qualitative methods are a form of grounded theory, theory that is "grounded" in actual experience. Glaser and Strauss (1967) in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, argued that instead of applying "grand theories" to social behavior, the correct approach was to gather a great deal of data, using anthropological methods such as interviews and field notes, and develop theories based on these data. The theory would be better and more valid, since it would be grounded in the the reality and context being studied (cited in Davie, 1987).

Focus Groups as Qualitative Research

Ethnographic methods, case study, and grounded theory research increasingly have been employed in adult education research (Merriam and Simpson, 1989). Focus groups, a form of case study, are widely used in both market and adult education research. Their advantages include versatility and flexibility. Questions may be changed in the middle of a session, or between sessions, if necessary. Disagreement exists regarding the amount of information generated by focus groups compared to individual interviews; however, there is agreement that focus groups produce better quality information because of the interaction among group members and the feelings of greater security and candor among participants (Bers and Smith, 1988; Morgan, 1988). The discussion presented below is a brief summary of focus group techniques to provide some familiarity with the process. Given the consensus regarding the technique of focus group research, many of the references which follow are drawn from Merriam (1988) *Case Study Research in Education*. An extensive body of literature regarding the theory and management of focus groups is available; the bibliography lists some key references.

A focus group can be described as a well-planned discussion, conducted by a skilled interviewer in a comfortable environment, which attempts to discover participants' perceptions about a clearly defined topic (Krueger, 1988). Focus group methodology differs from quantitative method in sample selection and size, data analysis methods, and reporting formats. However, reliability and validity are maintained, although generalizability of findings varies from qualitative methods.

Rather than employ the random sample technique of quantitative research, focus groups employ a "purposive" sample in order to comprise a group from which one may obtain the best information (Merriam, 1988; Merriam and Simpson, 1989). Once the criteria have been established for group membership, a population sample is located which meets that criteria. Consequently, participants in the group are carefully selected.

The literature suggests that the size of the focus group is related to the purpose for which the group is being created. Small groups are better suited for gathering detailed comments and revisions, while larger groups are "more economical" to obtain straightforward opinions (Erkut and Fields, 1987). Bers and Smith (1988) state that the optimal size for a focus group is 8 to 10 members, although the literature gives a range from four to as many as twelve (Morgan, 1988; Krueger, 1988). As the group extends beyond this number there is a diminishing return in the number and quality of ideas (Fern, 1982).

Analysis of focus group findings is an inductive process which begins with the first interview, according to Merriam (1988): "Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses, direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on" (p. 119). The investigator's analytical skill and sensitivity to the data influence the content and direction of the final report. As the data are reviewed, tentative categories are formed as suggested by the data, units of which are then sorted into appropriate categories. A unit of data, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), may consist of words, phrases, or entire paragraphs, as long as it is discrete and reveals significant information (cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 132).

The report of focus group research should include sufficient detail to persuade the reader that the conclusions do have a basis in the data. Although no standard format has been developed for reporting qualitative data, a general rule of thumb in sociological qualitative research, according to Lofland (1974), is a ratio of between 60 to 70 percent anecdotes and specific detail and 40 to 30 percent conceptual framework (cited in Merriam, 1988). The purpose of this "thick" description is to support the research findings and to permit the reader to vicariously experience the study's setting. The report, then, will vary considerably from the interpretation and analysis of statistical data gathered in quantitative research.

Reliability refers to the likelihood that a repetition of the process will produce the same results. According to Merriam and others (Krueger, 1988; Guba and Lincoln, 1988), the nature of qualitative research design rarely produces what is traditionally thought of as reliability. Since qualitative research may involve a reshaping of the questions as each set of data is gathered, and the gathering of data is a product of the skill of the interviewer, and since the interpretation of the data is linked to the world view of those interpreting the data, replication of research results is rare.

Rather than focus on reliability, Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue in favor of attending to internal validity of the research. Internal validity refers to the extent to which the researcher's findings concur with the reality of the experience as lived. Their argument is predicated on the assertion that internal validity is not possible without reliability, so proof of internal validity will also provide proof of reliability (cited in Merriam, 1988).

Internal validity, in this view, consists of obtaining outsiders' consent that, given the information provided, the results are consistent and make sense. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) state that such consistency can be obtained by providing a description of the investigator's assumptions, theory, attitude, and context; by use of multiple methods of data collection; and through provision of an "audit trail" which describes the collection and categorization of data, and the process of decision-making in the research (cited in Merriam, 1988). According to Krueger (1988) focus groups have high face validity. In fact, a study comparing focus group results with a large mail-out survey found a 97 percent level of agreement between the two methods; where a discrepancy existed, "focus group results proved to have greater predictive validity" (p. 42).

Generalizability, or application of research findings to a broader population, is also different from that of quantitative methods. The purpose of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' reality rather than to sample a large representative group, so application from what is usually a small sample in qualitative research to the general population is not generally appropriate. However, the findings may be applied to other groups which resemble the sample group and the research context (Krueger, 1988). Merriam (1988) calls this application "reader or user generalizability" and notes that generalizability can be improved through providing a "rich, thick description" by which others may evaluate transferability; by establishing the extent to which the research group is typical of other groups; and by conducting a "cross-case analysis" (p. 177).

Although qualitative research differs from quantitative research in purpose, methods, and reporting format, it presents the same academic rigor and attention to process, and provides information of a type and depth not possible with quantitative methods.

Conclusion

The significance of Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy as an attitude toward adult learners and its implications for instructional practice cannot be overstated. It permeates the literature of adult education, and in fact has become synonymous with the principles of adult education. When Conti developed his Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS), for example, he sent it to Knowles for validation as a measure of adult education principles (Conti, 1985).

However, the controversy over the concepts of andragogy in their application to adult learners raises a number of questions. Considerable research has been carried out at the undergraduate and graduate student level, and in non-credit learning activities, regarding the applicability of andragogical principles. Does andragogy present an accurate picture of adult learners at the college preparatory level? Do these learners desire an active role in their learning? What instructional techniques do adult learners in upgrading programs find helpful to their learning? To what extent do they meet the description of self-directed learners?

One way to seek answers to these questions is to ask the learners, and a qualitative approach using focus groups provides the flexibility and scope to obtain the learners' perspective.

CHAPTER THREE
THE METHOD

This chapter describes the stages of development of the research design under three topics: instrument design and piloting, selection of subjects, and data gathering and treatment.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of adult students as they experienced their first term of the College Preparatory Program at Red Deer College, and therefore is a form of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry, according to Merriam (1988), focuses on "meaning in context" and

> requires a data collection instrument sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. Humans are best suited for this task, and best when using methods that make use of human sensibilities such as interviewing, observing, and analyzing. (p. 3)

A qualitative research approach, using focus groups, has been chosen in light of the nature of the population under study and the research objectives.

CPP students generally have difficulty expressing themselves in writing; a research method based on written responses would therefore be inappropriate. These individuals are more willing and better able to express their ideas orally, and so interviews are a more appropriate means to discover their perceptions.

A group interview approach was used because of its advantages over individual interviews. Group interviews are useful to study a large number of people in a relatively short time to obtain a broad impression of a variety of settings, situations, or individuals (Merriam, 1988). Interviews, in addition to their more open structure, provide the interviewer with the opportunity to probe more deeply into individual responses as required. The group interview format provides the opportunity for group members to interact "to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1988, p. 12).

The objective of this project was to obtain students' perceptions of their learning experience. The focus group approach is well suited to this objective, for according to Krueger (1988), "Focus groups can provide [human resource professionals] information about perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of program clients. The procedure allows professionals to see reality from the clients' point of view" (p. 21). The use of group interviews, rather than individual interviews, to garner individual perceptions is supported by Morgan (1988), who states that "participants' interaction among themselves replaces their interaction with the interviewer, leading to a greater emphasis on participants' points of view" (p. 18).

The research approach is outlined below.

Instrument Design

The data gathering instruments included a survey questionnaire and interview guides. The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic and background information to create a profile of the students in both the research group and the general body of new students. This approach was used to establish the degree of similarity between the two groups and to support extrapolations of the findings from the research group to the new students in general. The questionnaire was piloted with AVC Edmonton upgrading students at a level similar to CPP 75-level students to evaluate the questionnaire for readability and content. The group found little need for revising the questionnaire, so it was duplicated for distribution.

According to Krueger (1988), focus group interview questions should be piloted with experts who are familiar with the study's purposes and with the participant group. This pilot group attends to the logical and sequential flow of questions, and the potential of probe questions to elicit the desired information. For this study, the interview questions were piloted with eleven CPP faculty members, most of whom have at least six years' experience in the program. Their suggestions were used to revise the interview guide. Their comments also provided information helpful to anticipate respondents' answers and thereby conduct a more effective interview.

Krueger (1988) goes on to say that focus group questions cannot be piloted in the same way that surveys can, since the nature of the participants, the interaction among group members, and the interaction between the moderator and participants will differ with every group. However, in order to test the wording and sequence of questions, a pilot test of the interview was carried out with two groups of upgrading students at AVC Edmonton. These groups were asked to critique the wording and sequence of interview questions, the effectiveness of the technique in eliciting individual perceptions, and the management of the interview. These interviews also provided the researcher with some valuable experience as a moderator of small group interviews.

Upgrading students at times are reluctant to express opinions individually, and open-ended, undirected questions often elicit little response. In this pilot, undirected questions were initially producing little discussion; therefore, in order to retain as much individuality as possible, and yet encourage participation, the pilot test used a modified version of the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). Ordinarily, participants in a NGT record their responses to a question silently. They then share these responses one at a time with the group until all responses are recorded. Each point is then discussed for members' clarification and evaluation, and then each member rank orders the points, using numeric values. The moderator totals the values assigned in the rank ordering by each member; the sum for each point establishes the group's rank ordering.

In this modified version of the NGT, participants were asked to form small groups, to silently write down their responses to the question presented on the overhead projector, and share their ideas with their group members. After about ten minutes of this small group discussion, each small group presented its ideas, in round-robin fashion, one at a time, to the large group. When all ideas had been recorded, each point was explained as necessary for members to understand and evaluate. No rank ordering was requested, since the purpose was to obtain as many perceptions as possible, not to rank them.

Students reported the silent recording of ideas allowed them time to gather their thoughts, and the small group discussion gave them the confidence to share their ideas with others. The process was productive, but time-consuming; one question required thirty minutes. Following this field test and necessary revisions, the interview guide was ready for implementation.

Selection of Subjects

Participants were initially to be selected using a quota selection method, in which "major, relevant subgroups of some given universe" (Merriam, 1988, p. 49) are identified and an arbitrary number of participants in each category is selected. This method is similar to "proportional stratified sampling" as described by Leedy (1989). From the Winter 1992 CPP intake, 15 students were to be selected from each of the three levels of the College Preparatory Program (a total of 45) to form three focus groups, one for each level in CPP. One group of fifteen students was to be comprised from those at the basic level of the program (50 level courses); one group from the intermediate level (75 and 85 level courses); and one group from the senior level (130 and 131 courses) of the program. The groups were to have slightly more females than males, a blend of married and unmarried students, and students with and without dependents. This composition was designed to be representative of the types of students found in the program.

Although this is larger than the maximum size suggested by the literature, the nature of the cohort group suggested a larger number of participants. As mentioned earlier, attrition rates in upgrading programs can exceed 60 percent. Also, enrolment is particularly fluid in the first few weeks of classes as students cope with personal, financial, institutional, and academic issues. Considering these factors, an initially large focus group was sought as a means to maintain a useful group size during the study. Departing participants were not to be replaced, but those who left the college between data collection points were interviewed individually, when possible.

The intent was to solicit participants by mail; however, college policies regarding confidentiality of student records prevented direct contact with students. Also, students frequently change their timetables during the first week of classes, so establishing a common meeting time became impossible. These difficulties indicated a change in approach was required; consequently, selection consisted of recruiting volunteers from one English class in each level and using class time for group interviews.

Subjects for the study were solicited from new, full-time (enrolled in at least two CPP courses) students in English classes at the 50, 75, and 130 levels in the College Preparatory Program at Red Deer College in the Winter 1992 term. English classes were selected since these classes have one-and-a-half and two-hour time blocks, which provide sufficient time for group interviews. A master enrolment list of new students, generated by Computer Services personnel, was used to identify classes containing sufficient new students to constitute a focus group. The researcher then conducted in-class presentations January 10 and 13, 1992, outlining the research project, participant criteria, and the researcher's obligations (see Appendix B). At the close of the presentation, volunteers were solicited and asked to sign an agreement form (included as Appendix C).

Although initially the design called for three focus groups (one for each level), initial recruitment produced insufficient participants at the 130 level, so a second 130-level group was established. Numbers of participants are indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Numbers of Participants

Course Level	January	March	May
130 level Group 1	4 males; 2 females	4 males; 1 female	4 males; 2 females
130 level Group 2	1 male; 3 females	1 male; 2 females	1 male; 3 females
75 level	6 males; 6 females	5 males; 5 females	3 males; 6 females
50 level	7 males; 4 females	6 males; 3 females	3 males; 3 females
Totals	18 males 15 females	16 males 11 females	11 males 14 females

Data Gathering and Treatment

Once the focus groups were established and meeting arrangements worked out, the data gathering began.

A questionnaire (see Appendix D) was administered to new students registered in CPP mathematics and English classes to gather general demographic information as well as information regarding level of education and expectations. These questions were used to establish the degree of similarity between focus group participants and new students in general. Questionnaires were administered via CPP English and mathematics classes to reach the greatest number of respondents, to promote higher response rates, and to gather data in an economical, efficient manner. The questionnaires were administered by classroom instructors during the week of January 20-24, 1992, the week following completion of the first round of group interviews.

Group Interview Procedure

Students' willingness to express their real feelings is central to the success of this study, so the researcher began each session by outlining the purpose of the study and stressing the need for students to be forthright and individual in their responses. The researcher's familiarity with the CPP program and faculty, and acquaintance with former students helped foster and maintain rapport with the interview group. Also, the format of the interviews and ambience created in the room were directed toward furthering the rapport among participants, and between participants and the researcher. Coffee, juice, and light snacks were provided at each session.

Student frankness was encouraged through opening remarks at each session which emphasized the need to relate individual viewpoints rather than group consensus or what students thought the researcher wanted to hear. The interview structure also facilitated the presentation of individual responses rather than a group consensus.

Interviews were conducted on campus at Red Deer College during participants' regularly scheduled class time at three points in the term: in mid-January, just after classes had begun; in late March, between midterm grades and the end of classes; and in early May, when students had received their final grades. The interviews sought to elicit initial student perceptions and to discover any changes in these perceptions over the course of the term. Interview guides, consisting of questions based on the research sub-problems, were structured to gather information on the same topics over the term. Open-ended questions, neutrally worded, were used to avoid influencing responses and to elicit as much information as possible. Probe questions were used to delve further as deemed necessary by the researcher.

All sessions were recorded with two unobtrusive PZM (Pressure Zone Microphone) microphones. An auto-reverse tape recorder loaded with leaderless two-hour tape was used to avoid loss of recorded dialogue, except for about five seconds when the recorder reversed direction.

Students were addressed in the interviews and in the study by their first names only to preserve anonymity. Similarly, students were asked to identify instructors by the subject taught rather than by name. Both student and instructor anonymity were stringently maintained throughout the study; all student names have been changed.

Although the pilot test used a modified Nominal Group Technique (NGT) described above, the first interview was conducted using a standard NGT method. The standard NGT differed from the modified version used in the pilot project by omitting small group discussion and by adding rank ordering of ideas. According to the literature, this method encourages individual responses, and has the additional advantage of producing a written record of the process, which would be useful to enhance the validity of the interview data. However, the process proved to be too time-consuming and ill-suited for the participants. For all but the first session, a focus group method was used to gather data from participants.

First Round of Interviews

The first round of interviews was conducted, one each day, on January 14, 15, 16, and 21, 1992.

The first session was conducted in a large, formal boardroom, chosen to accommodate fifteen people who would participate in both large group and breakaway small group activities. The room has low light levels and a somewhat imposing design and decor, and these characteristics seemed to inhibit discussion for the first interview. In addition, bad weather problems caused some students to stay home; although seven had agreed to participate, only five appeared. The session began a half hour late, waiting for late arrivals. After opening comments regarding the research objectives, confidentiality, and general guidelines, discussion began. This session was approximately 40 minutes.

As mentioned above, a standard Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was used for this session. Students were given five minutes to write down their responses to the first question. Participants then listed one item at a time, in round-robin fashion, until all responses were presented. Each response was recorded on a flip chart. No discussion was permitted at this point; however, after all responses were recorded, participants were given opportunity to explain or ask for clarification on any item. Each person then rank ordered the items, using a 5 to indicate the item which most represented their feelings, and a 1 to indicate the item with which they were least in agreement. The individual scores were then tallied to create a group rank ordering. At the close of the session, the group completed the questionnaire.

Because of the late start and the time-consuming process, only one question was addressed in this meeting. The participants agreed to meet in two days to continue the discussion, but only three appeared, all males. For the second part of this discussion, a focus group approach was used for the remaining three questions. With only males participating, the perspective presented in this session may not be reflective of what females experience in returning to school as an adult.

The experience of the first session strongly indicated a change in method was required. Although the pilot group showed the modified NGT elicited more information, the standard NGT was very time-consuming, as well as being somewhat tedious for participants. As mentioned above, only one question had been addressed in the first session, and the interview guide contained eight questions. Participant interest seemed to flag as the recording and ranking of perspectives was carried out. As well, this process requires some writing, and these participants, as mentioned earlier, are generally much more comfortable talking rather than writing. A concern was also that if the process was unsatisfactory for participants, they would withdraw from the study.

A major consideration was the brevity of information produced by the formal NGT. In the 40 minutes of this first session, only one question had been addressed, and the NGT was leading to convergence rather than divergence in expression of ideas. If adequate and useful information was to be gathered, the technique would have to be changed. In consultation with the thesis advisor, the interview guide was pared down to four questions (see Appendix E), and the format altered to a focus group approach.

The focus group involved a free-ranging discussion among participants. Although some focus groups are conducted with each participant responding in turn to the topic, in these sessions participants were asked to talk freely among themselves. After initial introductions were made and name tags distributed, the moderator outlined the objectives and methods of the project, and explained the procedure to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were also informed of the study's context and the researcher's position, and the first question was presented. The moderator served mostly to keep discussion on topic and to facilitate participation of all members by having participants direct questions to quiet members. Participants could also respond at will. The moderator monitored the discussion to reduce domination by any one person or group of people, and to encourage all to speak. This approach had the advantages of encouraging individual responses, creating a more relaxed atmosphere, and building rapport among group members. This approach worked well to establish a friendly, lively discussion.

To address all four interview questions within the time available, an equal amount of time was allocated for each question. This time frame ranged from approximately fifteen to twenty minutes, depending on total time available. A timer was set for the specified time period; when it rang, the group was asked for any closing comments. From notes taken during the discussion, the moderator then summarized the points participants had mentioned, using participants' own wording and examples to check the accuracy of the summary. Once any revisions or additions had been made, the next question was presented. When all four questions had been discussed in each session, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire.

The site for the interviews was also changed from the Boardroom to a smaller, brighter, more cheerful conference room where participants sat around an oval table. The change in room and method created a noticeable shift from a stiff, uncomfortable atmosphere to a more friendly, open mood.

As mentioned earlier, participants at the 130 level were fewer than called for in the research design, so another 130 group was constituted using the same in-class presentation method. This 130 level group was comprised of three females and one male, and therefore a female perspective was dominant in this session, which may in part compensate for the all-male perspective of the earlier 130 group. Interview groups for the other two levels were large enough for the study's purposes.

Round Two Interviews

The interview format was revised at this point of the project to adapt to students' timetables. Not all participants could meet as a single large group, so this round of interviews consisted of a number of small group and individual interviews conducted March 24, 25, 27, and April 2, 1992. Most small groups were interviewed in person; however, two individual telephone interviews were required to contact all available students. Due to attrition, the numbers of participants had dropped by a total of six, with losses in each level, as indicated in Table 1 (p. 30). These six could not be reached in spite of concerted attempts to do so, having left the college and left no notice of their whereabouts.

The format of allocating a fixed time per question for group discussions, used in Round One, was also followed for this round. Individual interviews, conducted in person and via telephone, were not under the same time constraints, but followed the same question sequence. At the end of the time allocated for each question, the interviewer summarized the comments for students' verification. Questions for this round, presented in Appendix E, attempted to determine to what extent student expectations of instructional techniques were being met. Students were asked to describe high and low points of the term, instructional techniques which helped and hindered their learning, and to comment on any changed perceptions regarding effective instruction.

Round Three Interviews

The third round of interviews took place on May 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 20, 1992. Students had completed final examinations and were either working, seeking employment, or had enrolled in summer session courses. Some participants had left the area; however, others who were unavailable in March were present for this round.

Male participants had dropped by five from March, but the number of females increased by three since the preceding round, and females now slightly exceeded males. Total participants had dropped by two (see Table 1, p. 30).

Since the academic term had ended, gathering the groups for interviews was difficult. Compared to Round Two, more interviews were conducted with individuals and pairs rather than large groups, and five individual telephone interviews were carried out. As in previous interviews, at the end of discussion for each question, the interviewer summarized students' comments for their verification. The interview questions repeated those of the first round to determine any shift in participants' perceptions regarding themselves as learners, the institution, and instructional techniques which might have developed by the end of the term.

Treatment of Data

Given the open-ended nature of qualitative research, the treatment of data was designed to be flexible and evolved to suit the nature of the information as it was presented. The literature stresses the need for immediate and continuous analysis of data, and that this process will affect the nature and direction of further investigation. According to Merriam (1988), "Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's questions, and so on" (p. 119). The data were treated in the manner presented below.

As mentioned earlier, the accuracy of the researcher's observations during interviews was checked with participants during each interview. The first four interviews of Round One were transcribed and the data analyzed to derive themes describing students' experiences. The themes were mainly derived from the four questions asked of participants, but topics within each category were created from the analysis. Data analysis consisted of sorting and refining topics and the sorting of data under these topics. Later interviews were also transcribed and the data sorted according to these themes and topics.

Summary

A focus group approach was used to gather data from freshmen students at three levels of the program and at three points in the program. Data were also gathered through a questionnaire administered to all interview participants and the majority of non-interview freshmen students. The formal environment of the college boardroom inhibited discussion during the first interview, so a much less formal tone and environment were established in a small conference room. A fixed time period was set for discussion of each question, at the expiration of which student comments were summarized to check the accuracy of researcher's notes.

As the term progressed, the initial single group interview format became more difficult to maintain as students' attendance became less consistent, so smaller group and individual interviews were required. As well, the number of participants declined over the term from 33 to 25, with a greater decline of males than females in the study. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and the data analyzed into themes and topics suggested by the data.

CHAPTER FOUR:
FINDINGS

A focus group approach was used to gather adult students' perceptions of their first term in a college preparatory program. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are student perceptions about themselves as learners as the term progresses?
2. What are student perceptions about the college as the term progresses?
3. What are student expectations and preferences regarding instructional techniques?
4. Do student preferences for instructional techniques change over the term?
5. To what extent do student perceptions reflect dependent or independent attitudes toward their studies?

Findings are discussed in four sections: the survey results are presented in one section followed by a section for each of the three interview rounds. Each round included four questions presented to three different levels of freshmen students. Their comments were categorized under themes created by the researcher. Following each question, student comments from the three levels have been selected to give a "thick description" which attempts to give a sense of the tone as well as the substance of group responses.

Survey Data

A survey questionnaire to gather demographic and attitudinal information was administered via classroom instructors to new students at Red Deer College during the week of January 20-24, 1992, the week following completion of the first round of group interviews. Mathematics and English classes were chosen, since these two courses are mandatory and would therefore contain the greatest number of new students. To minimize disruptions, classes with more than three new students were selected; instructors distributed and retrieved the questionnaire.

A total of 121 new students were registered in the Winter 1992 term; however, only 95 students were included in the survey. Twenty-six students were missed in the distribution. These students either were not registered in a CPP English or mathematics course, were absent on the day the survey was distributed, or were enrolled in a class not sampled, as mentioned earlier. Of the 95 questionnaires distributed, 62 were administered via English and mathematics classes. Of these, 49 were completed, for a 79% rate of return. Thirty-three were completed in the interview sessions, for a one hundred percent rate of completion. Students in the interview groups were directed not to complete questionnaires during the classroom distribution. The 82 completed questionnaires constitute 67% of the total population of 121 new students (see Table 2).

Table 2: Questionnaire Administration

Student Population	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned
Total New Students - 121	Non-interview group - 62	Non-interview group - 49 (79%)
Not interviewed - 88	Interview group - 33	Interview group - 33 (100%)
Interviewed - 33		

Statistical analysis, using SPSS-X software on a VAX computer, indicated no significant differences between the interview group and the non-interviewed new student population in 43 out of 44 comparisons, using a difference of $p \leq .05$ as that which could be attributed to chance. For this reason, the survey results are presented for the combined group. Results are first described and then presented in tabular and chart form. Percentages given are "significant percentages," and therefore will vary from actual numbers of participants.

Demographic Information

As may be expected, most new students lived near the college. Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of the students lived within Red Deer city or county, and an additional 20.7% were from other locations in Alberta. Nearly ten percent (9.8%) were from elsewhere in Canada, with the remainder (4.9%) from outside Canada. The majority (92.7%) of new students were enrolled full-time, and the male-female ratio was nearly 60:40 (males - 60.5%; females - 39.5%), a reversal of the pattern found in preceding terms, reported in the CPP Program Review.

The age distribution data reflects the trend of older students returning to education. A sizable portion (40.2%) were age 24 or younger, but 20.7% were between 25 and 30 years, and another 26.8% were between 31 and 40. Respondents between 41 and 50 comprised 8.5% of the sample, and 3.7% were older than 50 years.

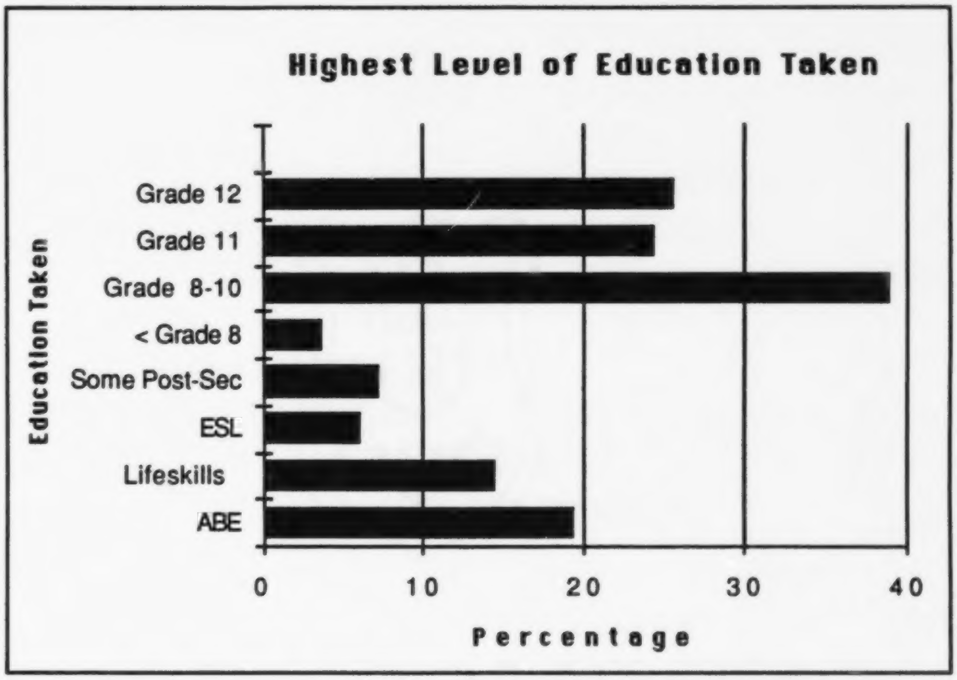
The marital status of respondents reflected the age distribution as well. Nearly half (46.3%) were single, without dependents, and 26.8% were single with dependents. Those married with no dependents were in the minority, at 6.1%, while those married with dependents comprised 20.7% of the sample.

Education Achievement

Totals in this section may in some cases exceed the sample size, for although respondents were asked to give only one response regarding public school achievement, they were to indicate all postsecondary education or training. For example, one may have both a high school diploma and a journeyman certificate.

Regarding public school education, only three students (3.7%) had less than Grade 8 education; the majority fell into the Grade 8 to 10 range (39%), with an almost even distribution between the next two categories. Those with Grade 11 comprised 24.4% of the group. Twenty-one individuals had taken Grade 12 (25.6% of the group), the same number (21) reported receipt of a Grade 12 Diploma. A small number (6 people, or 7.3%) reported "some postsecondary education." Ten people (12.2%) had received a trade or journeyman certificate, with five (6.1%) in receipt of "other technical or vocational certificate." Only one (1.2%) had attained a college diploma, and one had earned a university degree. Five people (6.1%) had taken English as a Second Language, and 16 (19.5%) had taken Adult Basic Education. Twelve of those responding to the questionnaire (14.6%) had taken Lifeskills Training. Surprisingly, only 27 (32.9%) reported taking academic upgrading beyond Grade 8. These data are displayed in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Highest Level of Education Taken



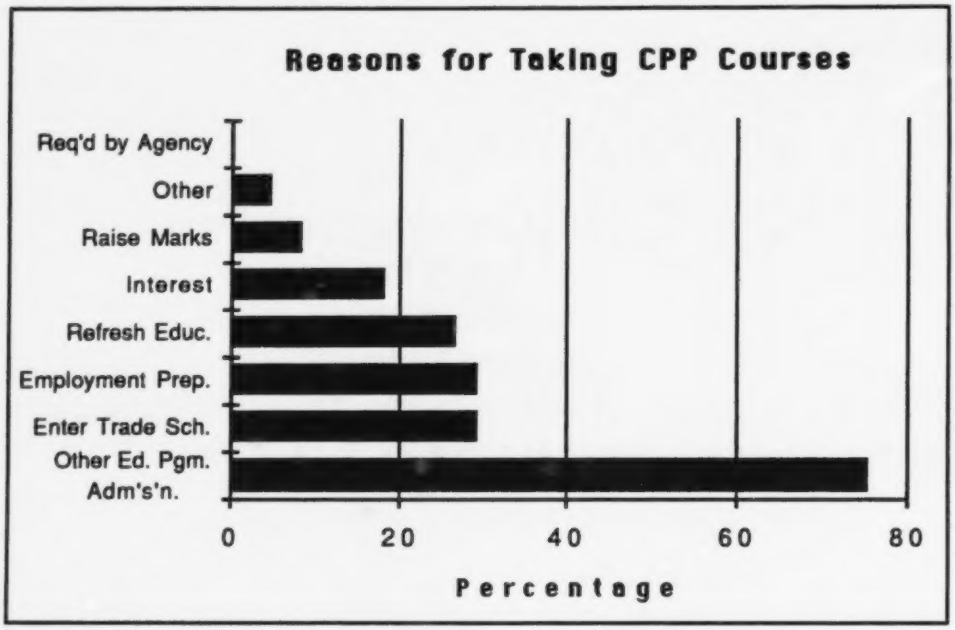
Reasons for Enrolling

As with the "Education Achievement" category, respondents were asked to indicate all relevant reasons for their taking courses, so responses may exceed the number of respondents.

None of the respondents was required by an agency to upgrade his or her education, but 15 (18.3%) indicated they were taking courses for "personal interest." Three quarters (75.6%, or 62 individuals) indicated they were enrolled to qualify for an educational program other than trade or technical school, and 29.3% were upgrading to qualify for a trade or technical school.

Twenty-four respondents (29.3%) were completing high school for employment reasons, seven (8.5%) intended to raise their marks, and twenty-two (26.8%) were updating or refreshing their education. Four indicated "Other" as reasons for enrolling, which included elaborations of other categories, such as "obtain grade 12 diploma," "finish high school," "so I can live," and "my future" (see Chart 2).

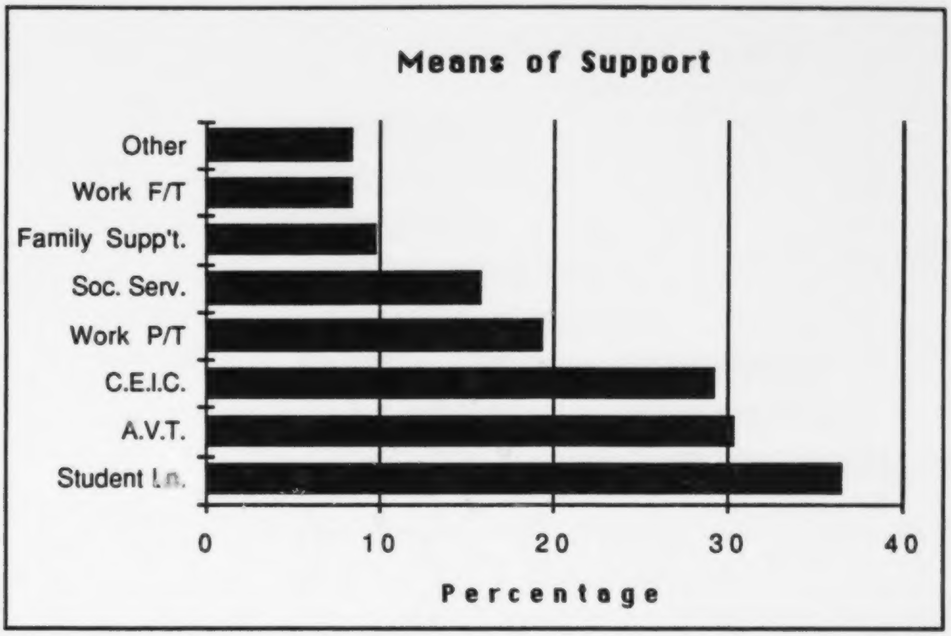
Chart 2: Reasons for Taking CPP Courses



Financial Support

As with other questions, students were asked to choose all responses which applied to their situation. Most students were being supported by either student loans (36.6%), Canada Employment and Immigration sponsorship (29.3%), or Alberta Vocational Training sponsorship (30.5%). About one quarter (24.4%) reported using personal savings, 15.9% were supported by Social Services, and 9.8% were being supported by their families. Nearly one-fifth (19.5%) expected to work part-time; 8.5% expected to work full-time. An additional 8.5% indicated "Other" means of support--unemployment insurance benefits, Department of Indian Affairs sponsorship, and employer support (see Chart 3).

Chart 3: Means of Support



Work and Family Demands

Although only 23 respondents indicated in Question 10 that they would be working either full or part-time, 49 indicated they would be working while attending school. This pattern may imply that students read the question to refer to work after graduation rather than work while in school. Responses were almost evenly divided among the three categories: 32.5% said they would work up to 19 hours a week; 32.6% said they would work between 20 to 39 hours; and 34.6% would work more than 40 hours.

The number (39) who responded to the question about time spent on family activities correlates with the number who have dependents. Seven (20%) indicated they spent up to 19 hours per week caring for their family; 16 (40%) spent between 20 to 39 hours on this task; ten (25%) spent 40 to 50 hours on their families; and six (15%) reported 51 to 80 hours of this work.

Major Adjustments

Many respondents had been out of school for more than five years living a non-academic lifestyle, so doing homework at night was the most common major adjustment, reported by 70 people (85.4%). Related concerns included managing time (69.5%), having students' families adjust to new demands on their time (53.7%), and being able to ask instructors for help (42.7%). Moving into a new environment was also a major adjustment, with "making new friends" identified by 40.2% as a major adjustment, and "getting to know the instructors" selected by 35.4% of respondents. Having their learning evaluated by another was indicated as an adjustment by only 31.7% of respondents. A summary of respondent characteristics is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Respondent Characteristics (n=82)

Characteristic	Response	
Pre-College Residence	Within Red Deer	64.6%
	Within Alberta	20.7%
	Within Canada	9.8%
	Outside Canada	4.9%
Student Status	Full-time	92.7%
	Part-Time	7.3%
Male - Female ratio	Males	60.5%
	Females	39.5%
Age Distribution	Less than 18	2.4%
	18 to 24	37.8%
	25 to 30	20.7%
	31 to 40	26.8%
	41 to 50	8.5%
	50 plus	3.7%
Certificates or Diplomas Received	High School Diploma	25.6%
	Journeyman Certificate	12.2%
	Other Technical Certificate	6.1%
	College Diploma	1.2%
	University Degree	1.2%

Table 3: Summary of Respondent Characteristics, continued

Marital Status	Single, no dependents	46.3%
	Single, with dependents	26.8%
	Married, no dependents	6.1%
	Married, with dependents	20.7%
Anticipated Hours Worked	0 - 19 hours	32.5%
	20 - 39 hours	32.6%
	More than 40 hours	34.6%
Hours Spent on Family Maintenance	0 - 19 hours	20%
	20 - 39 hours	40%
	40 - 50 hours	25%
	51 - 80 hours	15%
Major Adjustments	Doing Homework	85.4%
	Managing Time	69.5%
	Adjusting to New Demands	53.7%
	Asking Instructors for Help	42.7%
	Having Learning Evaluated	31.7%
	Making Friends	40.2%
	Getting to Know Instructors	35.4%

First Round Interviews

This first round of interviews was conducted on January 14, 15, 16, 21, 1992, after participants had been in classes for one to one-and-one-half weeks. The purpose was to gather student perceptions at the beginning of the term; subsequent rounds would discover any changes in student perceptions over the term.

With one exception, group interviews for each of the three levels of the College Preparatory Program - 50, 75, and 130 - were used. After opening comments, four questions were presented to the group, one at a time, followed by fifteen to twenty minutes' discussion as described in the Methodology chapter. When the allocated time had expired, the interviewer read to the group a summary of their comments to verify its accuracy. The exception, as explained in the Method chapter, was an initial Nominal Group Technique used with a 130 level group.

Participant Characteristics

50-level participants. This level is a basic entry level to the College Preparatory Program, approximately equivalent to Grade 9 in the public system, and therefore more accurately described as high school preparation. For purposes of the discussion, the 50-level group will also be described as a "basic" group.

This basic level group contained 11 participants - 4 females and 7 males. Two males had English as a second language, one with a year of university education in the Middle East, the other had not completed high school in his home country. Participants were quite evenly distributed throughout the age categories from age 18-24 to 50+, and had been out of school from nine to thirty-eight years. This class seemed to already have developed a group rapport, and were quite at ease talking with each other.

75-level participants. This level is an intermediate entry level to the College Preparatory Program, approximately equivalent to a grade 10-11 skill level. The 75-level group will also be described as the "intermediate" group in the following discussion.

Students in this intermediate group, unlike the basic group, had not gone through a "get-acquainted" exercise, and therefore did not know each other by name. However, they soon established an easy rapport in the discussion group, and spoke with apparent ease and frankness. The group was composed of twelve participants, six females and six males, two of whom were ESL learners. One ESL male had a graduate degree from university in his home country; the education background of the other was not established. Participants were slightly younger than the 50-level group, with 10 people under 40, and two in the 41 - 50 age group. Participants had been out of school from three to twenty years.

It should be noted that this group seemed to be unhappy with one instructor, and many of their comments are based on the context of this instructor's class. They spoke quite positively about their other instructors.

130 level participants. The 130-level is the senior level for the College Preparatory Program. Students may enter directly into the senior level if they possess the appropriate pre-requisite skills. Courses with a 130 designation are equivalent to 30-level courses in the Alberta public school system. For the following discussion, "130-level group" will be used interchangeably with "senior group."

As mentioned in the Method chapter, two groups were created at the 130 level to obtain sufficient participants. One group consisted of four males and two females, two between the ages of 18 and 24, one in the 25 to 30 age category, and three between 31 and 40. The second group included three females and one male: one individual in the 18 to 24 age category, two in the 25 to 30 category, and one between 31 and 40. Participants had been out of school from three to seventeen years.

Interview Data

Student responses were grouped according to common topics and placed into themes suggested by the data. A synthesis of each group's discussion is presented, followed by a frequency count of each topic in tabular form. Individual responses in each group are presented to impart a sense of the tone and content of the discussion. Generally, responses from the 50-level, or basic group, are presented first, followed by the 75-level, or intermediate group, and ending with the 130-level, or senior, groups.

1. What is it like being an adult student returning to college?

Participants' responses to this question indicated considerable enthusiasm, optimism, and excitement at the beginning of the term, countered by a noticeable degree of stress occasioned by the need to rapidly adjust to a student lifestyle. All groups found the experience of returning to school stressful; however, participants in the higher program levels articulated a greater number of stressors. Student comments have been grouped into two themes, the first of which includes six topics, and a second of five topics, all presented in descending order of frequency.

Returning to school is stressful. Student responses have been grouped under six topics, summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Stressors Identified by Students

Topic	Frequency
Adjusting to Academic Environment	50 level - 5; (n = 11) 75 level - 4; (n = 12) 130 level - 5; (n = 10)
Challenge to Self-Esteem	50 level - 2 75 level - 2 130 level - 9
Balancing Obligations	50 level - 2 75 level - 4 130 level - 5
Adjusting to Reduced Income	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 8
Generally Hectic Time	50 level - 0 75 level - 1 130 level - 5
General Entry Anxiety	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 5

(i) Adjusting to academic environment. Students had a wealth of comments about the stress of adjusting to an academic environment relating to learning skills, the pace of instruction, and concern about performance. As mentioned earlier, the interviews took place after the first week of classes, a hectic time for students generally, but even more so for those who had been away from formal learning.

For these adults, the first adjustment in returning to school was the need to develop or renew learning skills. Here, the source of stress most frequently mentioned was "getting used to the school thing again," and doing "all this homework." Part of adjusting to being an adult student is the need to be "consistent with everything," in this case keeping up with homework, meeting assignment deadlines, and studying for tests. Another adjustment is simply sitting in classes and doing homework. Sandy and Jim commented on the difficulty of remembering course content when so much new material is presented each day.

Others mentioned the need for improved time management, and for some form of learning skills refresher course. Luke, out of school for five years, felt, "If you've been out of school longer than four years, they should have a class you have to take just to bring your skills up." The need for courses to refine or develop learning skills was related to the need for more accurate placement tests. As Lori said, "They should do a background check on you. Find out what your history is in school so they know where to place you in a class."

The second adjustment related to the pace of instruction. The feeling that courses were being delivered too rapidly was common to all groups. Irene said she pushed herself until she had headaches every night, and others had problems retaining the information.

The senior group voiced the greatest concern about the pace of instruction. Lloyd noted that one instructor's constant clock watching was "unnerving," and his behavior indicated "he's obviously under pressure to cover this material within a certain timeline." Max stated that one instructor provides notes on the board; however,

> she's very fast at it so you don't have time. You're writing what she's already said and you don't hear what she's saying. It's really frustrating. For the adult students that have never taken or have been away for a number of years, they can't absorb it as fast as it's being taught.

Delma agreed: "She's doing it so fast that by the time I finally figured out what she said, we're three chapters ahead."

The third adjustment concerned performance in classes, a stressor partly because of previous unsatisfactory academic performance and partly because of anxiety over meeting current expectations. As Joe said, "I didn't know if I was going to be able to do it, because when you're going to school and getting only 50s, or failing classes, you wonder, 'Am I doing the right thing, going to a place where they're so far advanced in what you went to in Grade 12?'" Sandy, one of the older participants, said, "I find I'm still in panic mode when I hear the word 'tests'," and "I still go to bed doing those figures in my head." John, also an older participant, became anxious at the thought of doing oral presentations, and felt that the level of language used in classes was too high for ready comprehension.

Students found they also had to adjust to a more sophisticated vocabulary. John, as mentioned above, said the terminology used in class had him "dumbfounded." The dictionaries used in class added to his stress, for they presented "seventeen pages to tell you what the word is," in contrast to the dictionary he formerly used, which "gave the word and whether it was a noun or a verb and one description of what it was." Arthur noticed a contrast between his everyday speech and that used in classes: "I talk a lot of slang, and I have a difficult time relating to stuff like in English class." Kari echoed his statement, saying, "I have a hard time with some teachers that talk in terms that you cannot understand."

Four participants were coping with English as a second language. The two who had lived in Canada for a time prior to coming to school were somewhat comfortable with spoken English and were struggling with writing skills. For those new to the language, as Pierre said, "The biggest problem is just learn English."

(ii) Challenge to self-esteem. Adult students indicated returning to college presented a challenge to their self-esteem which arose over preconceptions about college, feelings of inadequacy, changes in relationships, and fear of failure.

For some, the threat to self-esteem derived in part from a preconception of what returning to school would be like. Irene half-jokingly said of her beginning the ABE program, "My image of going there was 'I'm going to be among little kids.'" Others' comments indicated a sense of inadequacy. Jari said of his return, "I thought I was smart, but I find out I'm not. I was asking some people who came back [to school] and they said, 'Oh, it's easy.' So I thought it was easy. I came, and it's not." Bernice felt she would be out of place in the classrooms: "agewise, well, I should know this; everyone will think I'm a dummy or something."

Blaine has a learning disability, and found the instructional resources insufficient for his needs:

> They [instructors] need someone in there who can teach them that there's students in there that can't learn properly, that take a little time to learn. It's hard to get any work done, because you're always behind, you don't understand it, and when the test comes, you're going to fail.

Mention was also made of challenges to self esteem caused by altered roles. Lloyd admitted, "I'd have to say my self-esteem was floundering because I'm putting my wife under pressure. She has to be the breadwinner, and that would perhaps change her attitude toward me, and family and friends' attitude toward me."

Participants were quite explicit regarding fear of failure. Joe and Sharene brought up the issue directly, along with its consequences:

> Joe: Failure. Just plain old blowing it. Basically the fear of going to school here until April and then finding out you have to do it over again.
>
> Sharene: Yeah, you're just holding your plans back for the future. If you fail your course or whatever, you're holding back another six months or whatever.
>
> Joe: If you fail, are you going to continue?

Geri attributed failure to improper course placement, but Delma found returning to school introduced a measure of competition: "Most of my friends have gone back to school and they're all doing quite well, so there's a little pressure on. What if I came back and failed or something?"

(iii) Balancing obligations to self, children, spouse and school. Trying to balance the demands of classes, maintaining a household, and meeting family obligations was stressful, particularly for those who have been out of school for a long time and have established home routines which may not include time for reading or studying. Of the eleven participants in the basic group, eight found the experience stressful, with the word "stress" or allusions to stressful situations [e.g. "problem," "very confused"] mentioned fifteen times. Three participants found the experience less stressful than their daily lives prior to beginning classes, indicating that the positive nature of the experience and anticipated outcomes of their return actually reduced stress. As Harvey stated, the experience was

> stressful, at school and outside school. Being at home, trying to do your homework--you got the television, the phone, all your friends are calling you, they don't realize that you are in school--and you try and do your homework at home. There's no way I can get my homework done and study too. There's just too many hours there and too many interruptions.

Those who were younger and had been out of school a shorter time seemed to find the return less stressful than older members, who also tended to be married and had children requiring care.

Others were a bit more explicit in describing the struggle to establish a balance between home life and other obligations. Karolann and Kari said it was "really hard trying to balance all your roles, including your social life." Karolann noted, "I had such an easy-going lifestyle, and now we can't do that any more." Both males and females mentioned this difficulty was compounded when one has children. Kari said, "I have a little boy who is just over one year and this is the first time I've had to leave him, which is *really* hard." Arthur replied that he has six children, and has difficulty with finding time:

> I don't have a lot of time to spend with the little guys. When I am home it's hard to explain to them "Leave me alone so I can do my homework," and the worst part is getting them to understand the situation at that age.

Lori said that the pressure at times can be almost too much: "Sometimes you get so much going you just feel like giving up, quitting--stay at home." However, she also pointed out the other side of the experience:

> When you're at home, you think "Why do I have to go to school?" And when you get up in the morning you think, "Well, I want to get a better future for him and me," and then you decide, "Well, I'd better go." And it puts a better light on your day all day.

Children demand attention, but so does homework. Female students mentioned that because of their children, they could not do homework until after nine o'clock, or had to miss classes when children became ill. Geri expressed the strain of balancing the demands of home and college this way:

> I have to do a lot of studying, but I have been making a point I'm not going to tell my daughter, "Go play in your room for the next three hours and don't bug me," and not flip out on her even though I have been trying not to pull my hair out and actually do that.

An important dimension of returning to school was a role shift in a relationship. For males returning to school, their wives may become the major wage earner in the family, a situation which places the wife under greater strain and affects the husband's self esteem. For Lloyd, the decision to return to school was not an easy one:

> I couldn't make the decision on my own, because it was such an affective decision. It puts my wife under a lot of pressure, because she has to be the breadwinner. She knows it's for the better, but it did at the time affect my self-esteem--like I had to ask her if this is going to be okay. I was suddenly in the position of having to ask.

(iv) Adjusting to reduced income. One group was acutely aware of financial adjustments caused by returning to school, but seemed to accept it as a temporary condition made bearable by the knowledge that "you're working for something" and that "it's not going to be like that forever." Arthur admitted to feeling guilty about not being "out there working." As a consequence his "class of living went down a few steps, but it'll be worth it in the end." Judging by the general agreement regarding financial adjustments in returning to college, participants seemed to accept this as a condition of returning to school. The brevity of discussion may be an indication that such adjustment was expected and therefore not unusual, or that they would rather not discuss finances among new acquaintances.

Financial adjustment was a key issue with members in two other groups. Seven people mentioned it directly, and others agreed with their points. Delma brought up the sharp contrast in financial status: "After having an income for eight years, and then all of a sudden going bang [to having no regular income]." Rita said that although one's income is reduced, "You have the same living expenses," but Delma countered, "You have more."

Jim said it was "hard to leave the work force to come back to school, because of the dollars," and then went on:

> You have to change the way you're living--budget differently. Instead of eating out three nights a week, you'll eat leftovers a bit more. Money is your life. A guy just has to learn how to live; you just have to learn to rebudget your standard of living.

Lloyd, Geri, and Sharene were also concerned about the financial adjustment. Lloyd noted the "change in lifestyle," that before coming to school, "If you want something, you go buy it; you want to do something, you do it because you have a constant flow of cash."

Joe pointed out that the financial adjustment involved a change in status: "There is a big change. When you're used to living high on the hog and all of a sudden you're in really tight budgeting, that's a change in status right there." Jim noted that the adjustment includes more than just the adult student: "Especially when you have kids, you can't say, 'Well, sorry, Dad's going to school, you can't continue on with your hockey.'" For these adult students the financial adjustment in returning to school was a major consideration.

(v) Generally hectic time period. The first weeks are hectic for adults returning to school, as they learn the layout of the campus and the range of college services, adjust to new demands on their time, develop or refresh learning skills, meet dozens of people, confirm financial support, and cope with registration and changes in timetables.

Harvey described the first two weeks as "running around like a chicken with your head cut off." Other participants also found the first weeks rather hectic. Geri noticed, "[I] always seem to be on the run. There's no more just sitting back and doing things that we used to do." Delma found this hectic time prevented her from learning about college activities and services: "You're so flustered you don't have time to stop and look at all the bulletin boards."

(vi) Entry anxiety. For some, a generalized anxiety characterized the return to school. Joe expressed a sense of optimism mixed with anxiety, with which others agreed, when he said, "It's like before a new job. Who actually slept the first night before you came to school? Lying there awake--tomorrow's a new day, a new life pretty much." Others, too, felt the anxiety keenly. Joan, for example, said, "I was very scared the first morning. In fact, until midnight the night before I was almost chickening out. It was very hard for me to go." Rita concurred, "Me too. My husband convinced me. He said, 'You're going! This is it! You've been talking for years--you're going.'"

Delma felt the pressure of anticipated academic competition heightened her anxiety: "I was terrified the first day I came back. I just about quit the first day I came back. The anxiety just about did me in."

Returning to school is positive. The above discussion outlines the number of stressors encountered by returning adult students. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, in spite of the stress, the dominant feeling was one of anticipation and optimism; participants were "excited," and "relieved," at the outset of the term. This positive attitude is expressed in the comments which have been categorized under the five topics presented below and summarized in Table 5 which follows this section.

(i) Sense of a positive future. The strongest element mentioned by all four groups was a clear sense of a positive future that would result from their return to school. Three participants said returning to school was less stressful than their previous lifestyle, and that their return would have a positive effect in both the short and long term. Bernice found her "learning ability is better," and that she grasped concepts better. She found her life "more stressful sitting at home," and that being in classes kept her mind "busy on positive things rather than negative things." Irene agreed that life as a student was more positive, for, as she said, "It beats sitting at home all day long, being by yourself, doing nothing. Here I'm learning--getting my education."

Others in the group did not add to these comments, but they did agree the return held promise of a better life. Ed drew a chorus of approval when he described the positive aspects of returning to school, part of which included the statement "it gives you a sense of well-being, knowing that you can go into whatever you want to do and even earn over the poverty line." He went on to add, "Hopefully, this is a process into being satisfied doing what you want to do in life and for the rest of your life." Arthur felt the benefits would have a ripple effect on his family:

> Everybody's going to benefit from it, because I've had good jobs, made good money, but they were no-place jobs. So me and my family will just have to suffer, but four years down the road it'll help everybody along.

Participants also drew a connection between education, career, and job security. Geri felt excited at the prospect of new career opportunities in the current recession: "Because of the way the economy is, I wanted to get a career started, and now's my chance. I was excited about doing that." Others added their perspectives. Joe felt "excited about the opportunity for change," and that "you're also planning for a greater future for yourself and your family." Lloyd seemed to summarize the feelings of most participants:

> Deciding to change presents whole new opportunities. It's a real drastic change, going from the work force to re-education. I think the most significant thing for me was that sense of relief. I finally decided that I'm going to change. That was the biggest, most impressive thing--the relief, to get out of that dead-end job that was just nowhere.

(ii) Want to be in school. Another positive aspect of the return to school for these adults was a contrast between their desire to attend school as teenagers and as adults. Members of all groups recognized they now wanted to be in school, where previously they went to school mostly because they had to, and that this difference has had a positive effect on their motivation. The topic brought out this exchange between Karolann and Kari:

> Kari: It makes a big difference when you want to go. It makes it a lot easier to learn because you want to learn and you can learn to make it fun.
>
> Karolann: You make a choice to go back to school, where as a child it's something that you just do because you're

> younger. It's a conscious decision and you tend to put more effort into it, I think.
>
> Kari: For sure, it's easier to keep your focus. As an adult you know how important it is.

Joan suggested that perhaps an additional reason adult students may be more motivated is that "you have money invested in this, and it makes a lot of difference. In high school, we never paid out of our pocket, and I find when I pay for it I want to get my money's worth."

This group also felt accepted as learners, which enhanced their desire to be in school. They said that the instructors "don't look down on you or give you the impression they're looking down on you because you don't know, so you do ask [questions]. They want you to ask." The feeling of acceptance is also extended by "the ones in the final years of their studies--they don't look down on you either just because you're coming back."

(iii) Positive role model for children. Parents in three groups mentioned that one of the positive aspects of their return to school was the creation of a positive role model for their children. Jari, although finding the return to school stressful, said, "[The children] notice I'm sitting in my room most of the time, so they see I'm doing something. I think I'm having some sort of positive impact on them." Delma, whose children were very supportive of her return to school, said, "I did it as much for them as for myself, so they could see that if I can do it, they can do something. If I achieve my goal, they can." Joe used his return to school as a negative example for his children, warning them, "Study, or you're going to be in my shoes."

(iv) Improved organizational skills. Members of the basic and intermediate groups found they became more organized after starting classes. Both Bernice and Irene mentioned they became better organized now that classes had begun, and Ed said, "Being organized gives you a sense of well-being."

(v) Increased self-esteem. Although mentioned in only two groups, a sense of increased self-esteem was implied by the general tone and comments of all participants. A sense of increased empowerment arose out of their optimism for a better future. As Ed, quoted earlier, mentioned, "It gives you a sense of well-being, knowing that you can go into whatever you want to do and even earn over the poverty line." Lloyd answered that his return to school would lead to "self-development, growth, and, of course, better earning power. As well, your sense of self-worth and self-esteem should be better. If you completed your education, you have a sense of accomplishment."

Table 5: Positive Effects of Returning to School

Element	Frequency
Sense of Positive Future	50 level - 1; (n = 11) 75 level - 4; (n = 12) 130 level - 6; (n = 10)
Want to Be in School	50 level - 1 75 level - 3 130 level - 4
Positive Role Model for Children	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 2
Improved Organizational Skills	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 0
Increased Self-Esteem	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 1

2. What could the college do, by way of facilities and services, to support you as a learner?

Participants at this point identified more services than facilities which would be supportive of their learning. Responses to this question have been divided into two themes, a need for information and a need for services, each with several elements, again presented in descending order of frequency.

Need for Information. The responses to this question are summarized in Table 6 below, and each category is elaborated by presenting excerpts of students' discussion, beginning with comments from the basic group.

Table 6: Information Students Desire

Element	Frequency
Orientation Information	50 level - 1; (n = 11) 75 level - 8; (n = 12) 130 level - 4; (n = 10)
Registration Procedure	50 level - 0 75 level - 6 130 level - 4
Information Regarding Department Policies	50 level - 0 75 level - 7 130 level - 0
Counselling Information	50 level - 4 75 level - 2 130 level - 8
Financial Aid Information	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 1
Tutorial Assistance	50 level - 0 75 level - 1 130 level - 2

(i) Orientation information. Most students would like a general orientation to the college's physical layout and student services. Participants suggested "adding a day before for the College Prep students that are new, and have a person that shows you where to go, what to do, what to expect, and what to have organized, so that you can be ready for the start." Students said the present orientation session "didn't tell me a thing." Rita went to the orientation "expecting to find out about getting parking and lineups and lockers, and they didn't tell me any of that." Similarly, Delma expected "to go in and have somebody say, 'You need parking,' and tell you where you go and who you see. 'You need a locker, this is where you go. This is where the Study Hall is.'"

(ii) Registration procedure. As discussed in Question One above, most students in the intermediate group had unhappy experiences with the registration process. Maxine explained that new students need information to be openly provided rather than supplied in response to specific questions: "We haven't been here before. This is a first for us, and if they don't tell us, we don't know, and we don't know enough to ask the right questions." Those in the senior level had similar experiences.

(iii) Information regarding department policies. The intermediate group, in general, raised the need for information regarding department policies and requirements. Arthur, for example, mentioned the difficulties lack of such information creates:

> Anybody with sponsorship has to put in twenty-five hours per week and class time's only twenty [hours]. Nobody told us we had to make up that other five hours, and all of a sudden you run into somebody [who says], "Well, you're supposed to be in Study Hall." It puts a lot of pressure on you, because you know you better get it together and start doing this.

(iv) Counselling information. Participants were particularly concerned about making a wrong career choice because of insufficient information. Bernice voiced a concern seemingly held by most people in the basic group:

> I don't know what I want to be yet, or which direction I'm going. I have a goal but I'm willing to change it because I'm not too sure. Right now I'm finding it hard trying to decide what direction I'm going to go, and I just feel if they had a person in each field that you could go talk to about that particular training or job, I would find that very helpful, rather than reading it out of a book.

She elaborated on her point, saying that for her to look up the information on her own is time-consuming and costly, in that she would have "to take a lot of extra time off, get a baby-sitter, [and] go to [the] Career Centre to find out what I want to be." She was also concerned that her own search would be limited, because of her unfamiliarity with the range of choices available to her: "I don't know all the job positions in all the fields, and there are positions out there I don't even know about that I might really want."

Other students expressed a desire for information about various occupations as well. Suggestions for college services included a career fair specifically for CPP students and an information service in each program area of the college. They also suggested guest speakers from different fields be brought in to speak about their occupations. According to Harvey, these guests would be someone "who's had the experience for few years, to tell you what the expectations are, what are the hours, if there's a lot of stress. If you have to deal with people, what kind of people they are, so you get a better idea."

Students were concerned about the suitability and availability of employment, given the years of preparatory education: "After all the years of education, you go into it--you're in it for a year, you look at yourself and you say, 'I hate the job.'" John echoed the concern: "Some of them you study for four years and you come out and you can't get a job for twenty years--what was the sense of taking it?"

(v) Financial aid information. Ed made a very strong case regarding students' need for accurate and complete information regarding the student loan application process. Lacking such information, he delayed sending out his loan application until after being accepted into the college. Accepted late in the year, Ed stated, "[If] I hadn't been able to make the arrangements that I did, I would have had to wait another six months." Joe raised a similar point about scholarship and bursary information, noting, "There are thousands of dollars of grants available, but there are lots of them that nobody knows about. How do you find out?" He also linked such support to student motivation:

> If people had a list of scholarships made available--because a lot of people do not even know they exist--then people could apply and they would work that much harder to achieve the marks to receive the scholarship for the next year. It would give them that much more incentive.

(vi) Tutorial assistance. Students seemed to know little about the services available to them in the area of learning support. Cory said, "The only thing I use is the Study Hall and the library," which appears to be the experience of most students. Only four of the eleven students in the basic group knew about the Learning Assistance Centre, a service offering tutorial help and study skills workshops.

Only the senior group mentioned the need for more information about tutorial assistance. Joe thought the college offered tutorial help, but said, "You just have to find the right connection. A list of connections would be nice." At this point in the term, given the little mention of this topic in relation to the number of comments about course pace, Henry's answer may be representative: "I never really thought about it. I just thought I wanted to come out with top marks and relied on myself."

Need for Services. In addition to information, participants mentioned a desire for services, elaborated below and summarized in Table 7 at the close of this section. The request for services correlates in many ways to the desire for information.

(i) Registrar's office and registration procedure. As may be expected, comments regarding the Registrar's Office, discussed above, led to suggestions for better organization and friendlier treatment. Improved organization, students felt, would result in fewer ejections from the registrar's lists, and more accurate and complete information. One group suggested that either the College Preparatory Program or the Registrar's Office provide new students with assistance during the registration procedure. Arthur acknowledged the presence of an orientation program, "but the thing is they don't tell you anything about your registration or anything like that." The students suggested the orientation activity could provide financial information, check on completeness (and present status) of registration, assist with timetable changes, and general preparation for classes.

(ii) More tutorial assistance. Participants mentioned the rapid pace of instruction, and commented that the college could provide more tutorial assistance than is currently available. Lloyd pointed out "the Learning Assistance Centre does have limited resources, so it's not accessible to everyone," and Joe mentioned the narrow range of tutorial assistance: "I was there yesterday, and as of yet they don't have a math tutor. All they have is an English tutor." Henry suggested one way to assist learners would be for instructors to help form study groups.

(iii) More flexible registration/individualized pacing. Participants felt the college placement procedure in many cases did not place students in appropriate courses. Some students felt they were placed in courses too difficult for them in one discipline, and in courses that were too easy in other disciplines. The too-easy courses, in particular, were a waste of their time, as Arthur pointed out: "If you're sitting at level 50 for three months and you figure you should be doing 75, then you feel like you're wasting that three months. You could be going ahead and getting out faster." Luke agreed, "That's exactly it. I've wasted money; I've wasted time."

Although the college permits timetable changes within the first week of term, students felt the policy did not meet their needs. Once he began reviewing a math course, Luke said, "As I look at it, I remember everything." For this reason Luke suggested a computer-delivered course that allowed one to proceed at his own rate "just like an equivalency exam. When you write the equivalency exam, you get a big textbook and you can test yourself on the stuff, and if you get a [mark], that gives you an idea how you're going to do on the exam." Christine agreed that lack of challenge reduces motivation:

> The classes move too slowly if all you're doing is looking into the book and refreshing your memory. As soon as you do look at [the books] and you remember right away and you whip through it and

> you're done, the classes are moving too slowly. And then you get bored and you want to drop out.

Arthur pointed to the desirability of a more flexible, individually paced advancement policy:

> It's too bad they don't have a system where you could go into a course, say for three weeks, and if you knew it and you figured you could move up, instead having to be there for the whole semester, you could move up faster.

(iv) Other concerns. Pierre, a student with ESL needs, felt "there are too many people in some classes" to enable the instructor to provide sufficient individual attention to learners. Pierre's idea was also mentioned by Lloyd, who linked the CPP program with adult education, rather than high school equivalency, and more individualized instruction: "If CPP is basically adult education, if it would be possible to make the classes smaller, you could have more one on one with the instructor."

Students found the Study Hall to be noisy and unattractive, and therefore not conducive to its purpose. This opinion would be supported later in the term by all groups.

As discussed earlier, Ed raised the issue of financial support. Because of misinformation, he delayed his application for a student loan, and found himself short of money. To pay tuition and book costs, Ed approached the college Financial Aid Advisor for an emergency loan, but was told only that he should have applied earlier for his loan.

Luke proposed providing brief refresher courses prior to the beginning of classes to place returning students in appropriate courses. Another means to address the learning needs of returning students would be to provide more instructional time within the term. Lloyd thought instructors should have "longer periods of time" since they are apparently under time constraints and suggested streaming students according to length of time out of school. He argued, "I think we need a little slower pace, and a little more attention."

Pierre, the ESL student, felt the college could assist ESL students by providing "English interpreters, just for a couple of weeks when people are starting."

Table 7: Services Students Desire

Element	Frequency
Registration Procedure	50 level - 0; (n = 11) 75 level - 8; (n = 12) 130 level - 2; (n = 10)
More Tutorial Assistance	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 3
Flexible Registration/ Individualized Pacing	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 1
Other Concerns	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 1

3. What instructional techniques do you think should be used to teach adults?

This question was intended to focus on instructional techniques in a narrow sense. Discussion was related initially to the examples of instructional techniques mentioned in the question, but some comments related more to lesson planning and presentation than instructional techniques. Most groups felt a class structure that provided for an active student role would facilitate their learning.

Participants were quite emphatic about the usefulness of being active in the classroom. Max said, "If we had the teachers ask the students to go up and do problems on the board, more than just ask out in general, I would find that helpful." Joan agreed: "Straight lecturing doesn't work for chemistry." Henry stated the attraction of being active:

> I think that anything when you get the students involved with other than sitting in their desks and taking notes is really good. It's fun when you get to do stuff other than take notes. And it's something you remember a whole heck of a lot better.

The discussion below begins with instructional techniques, summarized in Table 8, and moves on to instructor characteristics. Elements are presented in descending order of frequency.

Table 8: Instructional Techniques to Teach Adults

Element	**Frequency**
Small Group Activities	50 level - 8; (n = 11) 75 level - 5; (n = 12) 130 level - 6; (n = 10)
Class Discussion	50 level - 8 75 level - 5 130 level - 6
Individualized Instruction/CML	50 level - 2 75 level - 5 130 level - 1
Role Plays	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 2

(i) Small group activities. Small group activity was the preference for nearly all participants, who gave three reasons for their preference. Students admitted that they found difficulty in understanding and retaining information through reading, and therefore for them the discussion that took place in small groups had the dual advantages of helping them understand and retain ideas. The comments about small group activity also apply to class discussions, since the interview groups made no distinction between the two techniques in this round of interviews.

Students felt that small group activities helped their learning in that talking with one's peers was less anxiety-producing than conferring with the instructor. Sandy stated what others affirmed: "You're not so nervous, I find, when you're dealing with your peers." Harvey agreed: "The teacher is at a higher level than my thinking, and some[one] in the class is at the same level I am and they understand [me] a little better than what a teacher would." Sandy directly stated the concern about talking with an instructor: "I don't mind saying to Irene, 'God, I feel stupid; I can't get this.' But I would feel intimidated to say that to an instructor."

Students felt that small group activities help learners understand course material better. Harvey made the point that discussion has an advantage over simply reading material on one's own: "As you're discussing it, you're thinking about it a lot more than just reading it and not thinking about it."

Arthur felt much the same: "I always found that group learning was a lot easier because it's easy to understand somebody besides your instructor, and if you don't know something, the person next to you might, or if they don't, you might." While recognizing that group presentations may not be suitable in all classes, Joe felt

> working in a small group would definitely help because when you hash things out you remember them a lot easier than one person quickly scribbling something on the board and you quickly write it down and then you're supposed to remember it.

Harvey summed up the advantage of group activity as "teaching each other."

Sandy was the first to mention that small group discussion helps participants to retain information: "I seem to be able to retain things that we do in small groups. Take a problem and discuss it, and I seem to be able to remember it better it that way than if I'm reading it out of a book." She also brought up an additional advantage of small group work:

> Quite often people have really good ideas about how to remember something. You can't expect the instructor to have all these ideas on how to remember these different words, where Irene says, "The way I remember is that I do this, this, and this, and I remember better." And that way I'd be better able to retain it.

Students found small group activities to be useful enough that they sought them outside of class. Rita joined a group to study chemistry. Max said, "One thing I was looking forward to coming back to school was working in groups. After class, you get together and you work the problems among a small group."

(ii) Class discussions. As mentioned earlier, comments similar to those about small group activities were offered regarding the topic of class discussions. Most participants appeared to equate the two activities, although Irene brought up the idea of class discussion following question-and-answer activity. "I think it makes a difference," she said. "If someone asks a question that you didn't want to ask, then you're glad they asked it because it really helps you out. There are times when I ask a question and I think it's a stupid question, and yet it's a good one because maybe it helped someone else out."

(iii) Individualized pacing/instruction. In somewhat of a contrast to the usefulness of group activity, participants also voiced a preference for individualized pacing and instruction, expressed as a desire for computer based instruction. Luke felt that such instruction would allow students to progress more rapidly:

> I find [mathematics] really easy. I just took it as a review, thinking I wouldn't remember some of this stuff and it would come back to me, but if they would have had it on computer, I would be done already and I could be concentrating on English.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion under Question Two, students would like to move through course work at a pace determined by their learning ability, rather than by the instructor's pace.

Students also felt that because of the time they had been out of school, a more individualized approach would be preferable, because "we're in at so many different levels, we need a lot more personal time with the teacher instead of the five minutes after class for your questions."

Joan felt disadvantaged when instructors assumed learners possessed background knowledge they did not have:

> Some students are just fresh out of high school, and others have been out of school for 20 years. Especially with Chem 75. If [students] are going into 130 you know they have some background, but [not so with] Chem 75, so [instructors should] not assume that you have any sort of background.

For these learners, meeting students at their level of instructional need implies a more individualized approach to instruction.

(iv) Role playing. The value of role playing in understanding course concepts was presented somewhat bluntly in Henry's comment:

> In Social Studies, we're studying the government of Canada, and we're going to simulate the House of Commons and passing of legislation through it. I think that's really helpful, because if you don't learn how the House of Commons works by doing that, there's something really wrong with you.

Helpful instructor characteristics. Some student responses described instructor traits which helped them learn rather than techniques by which the class interacted with each other and with course material. These traits, summarized in Table 9, are described below, according to frequency of mention.

Table 9: Other Instructional Techniques to Teach Adults

Technique	Frequency
Appeal to More Than One Sense	50 level- 5; (n = 11) 75 level- 1; (n = 12) 130 level- 4; (n = 10)
Repetition and Review	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 3
Get-Acquainted with Classmates	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 2
Avoid a Whole-Part Approach	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 0
Indicate Important Ideas	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 3

(i) Appeal to more than one sense. Students in three groups felt presentation of content should appeal to more than one sense, since, as

Lloyd said, "There is a certain group of people who are not auditory learners, they're visual learners." Overhead transparencies, "depending on how the copy is," and notes on the board were given as examples. John said he found taking notes from overhead transparencies helped him learn "an awful lot more than reading out of a textbook or somebody getting up and giving a one hour lecture where you're asleep after 10 minutes."

(ii) Repetition and review. Another characteristic students felt facilitated their learning was frequent in-class repetition and periodic review of course content. Harvey felt the combination of small group activity and review would work well: "The small group idea would be good for an hour a week to review the material so that it sinks in better when you're just learning how to absorb this kind of material and trying to put it down afterwards on paper in a test form."

(iii) Get-acquainted with classmates. One activity that received general positive reaction was the use of a get-acquainted activity at the beginning of term. Harvey said he "felt more comfortable in the class after [the exercise]; [he] wasn't so nervous and it was a lot better." Max was quite positively affected by the activity: "That was one of the reasons I wanted to stay in that English class--everybody was so friendly." Joan also found "it's a way to get more relaxed in the group."

(iv) Avoid a whole-part approach. Harvey and others said that instructors who explained too much confused the learner. They felt that when an instructor attempted to place an individual concept into a larger context, they became confused and anxious. Harvey indicated the confusion this whole-part approach creates:

> [Do] not start telling about something and then jump ahead because you're going into this later on, and then you're getting all prepared for this and you forget about what you're doing right now. I get kind of lost and then it takes me a while to get back into retaining that. Just stick with the main subject and don't go quite so far ahead and get into it and jump back again.

Sandy said the the whole-part approach created anxiety: "It throws a scare into you. 'My God, we've got to do this over here and I don't even know what I'm doing over here yet.'"

Indicate important ideas. Max, Rita, and Delma found it helpful when instructors indicated which information is important to remember, and if instructors were flexible enough to give students a choice in their assignments. Lloyd, on the other hand, wanted to see the application of content: "If you tell me A+B=C, fine, I understand you. But if you show me an example of how to apply that, then I know the concept and I know how to physically use it."

Generally, students at the beginning of the term felt that small group activities and class discussions would facilitate their learning. In addition, they cited instructional strategies which required an active student role and listed their perceptions of helpful instructor characteristics. Students did not express a desire to see the application of their learning, one of the assumptions regarding the adult's problem-based approach to learning.

4. As a Learner, Would You Want To Be Consulted About the Content of a Course?

Participants' response to this question was almost a unanimous "No." Part of the reason for this response was that respondents were uncertain about the mechanics of including learners in the course design. Some thought students would design a course which would apply to all learners; others felt the design would be individualized. In either case, students felt the process would be confusing and that the class would have difficulty in reaching agreement. Arthur said, "You'd have so much input into it, so much different stuff, unless it was individual instruction. If you had 36 different students you'd have 36 different ideas of what should be taught in the classroom." Albert said student input "would cause mass confusion" because "people are taught to follow guidelines, and if you don't follow that rule you could cause major complications." Aside from concern about the potential for confusion caused by the process, participants expressed several additional reasons for not being included in course design. These reasons are summarized in Table 10, and elaborated in the discussion which follows.

Table 10: Desire for Consultation Re Course Content

Concern	Frequency
Students Do Not Know Enough	50 level - 2; (n = 11) 75 level - 6; (n = 12) 130 level - 4; (n = 10)
Students Would Pick Easy Topics	50 level - 4 75 level - 1 130 level - 1
Awareness of Need for Long-Range Planning	50 level - 1 75 level - 1 130 level - 2
Student Input into Method, Not Content	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 2
Course Design Influences Motivation	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 1
Students Already Have Too Much Responsibility	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 0

(i) Students do not know enough. Most participants felt that students did not know enough about the academic disciplines to make decisions about course topics, and that the education system and the instructors are best suited to design courses. Respondents felt their lengthy separation from school left them ill-equipped to design their own learning: "You're coming back most times after such a long time, you don't even know what you're going to be learning anyways. I think if I had to choose it I would draw a total blank. I wouldn't know," said Kari.

Joe and Lloyd agreed that being out of school for a lengthy period and having freedom to design their own learning would be detrimental, as Joe said, "How can you have input into something that you really don't know that much about because you've been out of it for so many years? We've been out for 17 years and we say 'No, we don't want to learn that because we can't remember it.'"

Lloyd brought up the consideration of curriculum planning knowledge as an important element that students lack. He felt that "certain concepts, certain instruction has to be done in a pattern so you can lead up to understanding the whole." He then added, "I think the education system is best suited to develop the programs. It would be nice to have input though."

In regard to student knowledge regarding course topics, Henry's comment is representative: "I think it's better that the powers that be, the people in the education department, decide instead of the student. Several years ago they saw a problem that not everybody could fit into the 10-20-30 [high school matriculation program] and so they made the 13-23-33 [non-matriculation program] and I think that was a good choice."

(ii) Students would pick easy topics. Members of all groups felt that students would take the easy way out if allowed to determine the content for their own courses. One of the consequences of such choices, in their opinion, would be a lower quality of education. Students also felt they need to be challenged, which might not occur if students chose course topics. As John said, "You're going to look for the easiest way to do anything, so if I had a choice, I'd say, 'Fine, let's do everything practical, where I can do it with my hands.' The next one might not be able to learn that way." Others said "some people might pick all the difficult stuff, which some of the people can't get," an equally unsatisfactory situation.

Other participants thought that having students provide input into course design "could vary the levels between colleges." If one college were to be "more democratic" and another college follow a prescribed curriculum, Jari was concerned that "you find you don't know anything, because you have been going the easy way." He thought instructors and employers may categorize people on the basis of the program the learner has created and that this categorizing would lead to stigmatizing:

> I think in the long run, they will start dividing people into categories. If someone comes from the adult school [an employer] will say, "We can't expect too much of him because the program is so low; they try to push those people through. I think that could create some sort of misunderstanding because the instructors and everyone else will expect less from us than from the regular students.

Jari felt that learners should be challenged: "Don't lower [the standard of achievement]. It's better to come up higher than lower, because it's going to come up on you sooner than later."

(iii) Awareness of need for long-range planning. Participants generally felt that at this stage of their academic preparation for careers or employment they may not have the knowledge to plan an education which will prepare them for a range of choices in the future. For this reason, students saw the instructor as providing a counselling role through presentation of a broad general education. Students pointed out what they felt were potential problems with designing their own education. Albert thought that if a student were to obtain only a passing mark, and later on "were to go back [to school] and he needed more than a D, he'd have to start all over again."

John brought up the idea that should students select their own course topics, they might lower their expectations of themselves, and these lower expectations could have unhappy consequences:

> If you only need a D, you won't put in any more effort to get a B. You can set your expectations high because you'd like to get an A, but realistically if you set it for a C+ to a B- and you fall into that category, that's great. If you blow it, well, you didn't quite make it but you're still high enough to pass. If you just say, "I need a D," you wouldn't study as hard.

Irene followed up on John's point by making a connection between the adult students' self esteem and lowered expectations: "If you only need a D, that's lowering your self-confidence quite a bit."

Arthur was more specific about the need for experience in academic planning:

> They [instructors] know what I'm going to need to get into university as a social worker. I don't know. It might look good now, but two years down the road it might mean nothing to me. But this way the instructors know where you're going, more or less, if you're going into university, and they set down a standard to reach that goal, to university-level entrance.

Part of the instructor's educational planning role, from the students' perspective, is to be current regarding knowledge of trends and issues in a discipline area. Lloyd said, "They know what is important, what is going to be in demand. If things are changing, they know that." Karolann felt student planning would be hampered by ignorance: "The issues change really quickly. What someone wants to learn one year may not be the same the next year."

(iv) Student input into method, not content. In spite of the number of reasons given for not wanting to participate in course design, students in two groups did feel "you could put in on how to teach it; not what to teach but how to do it." Henry worded it this way: "I think as a student you should have a say in how you're taught, but not really the material, because I think a person with a better education would be a better decision-maker in that role." Karolann would not want to design the course, but would appreciate "that you had freedom to say 'Whoa' or 'Can we spend a day going over such and such?' or something like that."

(v) Course design influences motivation. Another reason given for not wanting to design courses was that participants felt the established courses were a factor in student course selection and motivation, as Lloyd said, "If you want to learn something, you pick a course that fills that criterion. So you make up your mind what you want to learn and pick the course that fills the bill."

(vi) Students already have too much responsibility. Given the amount of stress and confusion students expressed at the start of their return to school, student reaction to the addition of course topic selection was not surprising. Karolann said, "It's too much. You have so much responsibility as it is, why would you want to pick out your course content? I wouldn't want the responsibility."

Most students would rather not participate in determining course content, but would like to be consulted about instructional activities. Participants cited their own lack of knowledge as a barrier and found problems with the mechanisms and the consequences of planning their own courses.

Second Round Interviews

For this round, the interview questions were designed to discover students' perceptions about themselves as learners and about instructional techniques. Responses presented a wide range of perceptions which match those found in the literature in adult education. Although general themes derive directly from the question, more specific points and their importance to the returning adult student are described within themes. The responses are presented below, in order of descending frequency.

Participant Characteristics

At this point in the term, a marked change in attitude was apparent among participants. They were noticeably more relaxed and comfortable during the interviews, were more sure of themselves in expressing their opinions, and were positive about their experiences to date. The total number of participants had dropped by six, with losses in each group; however, a significant number was still maintained, with 5 males and 3 females in the senior group, 5 males and 5 females in the intermediate group, and 6 males and 3 females in the basic group. Attrition in each group is summarized in Table 1 on page 30.

Students had been asked to keep a Learning Journal for the thirteen weeks of the term, so that they could review their journal entries prior to responding to the questions. However, only a few maintained the journal in any detail over the academic term, so they were not used as data for the study. Information was obtained from only the survey and the focus group interviews, as mentioned previously.

Interview Data

High points. The first question of this round asked participants to describe the high points and the low points of the term to date.

(i) Doing better than expected/capable of doing the work. Nearly all respondents said a high point was performing better than they had expected in their courses, and expressed pleasant surprise at this outcome. Many participants had had negative previous experiences in education, and did not expect to achieve the marks they received. Bernice, for example, said, "I'm above average [at midterm marks] and that surprised me because when I was in school as a teenager, I didn't do well in school at all. I was surprised to realize that I am capable of doing what everybody else can do." Three other participants in Bernice's group agreed. Irene, for example, moved from "I thought I was really dumb," because she had been referred to a learning assistance program, to receiving a student recognition award.

The ten respondents in the intermediate group were also in general agreement about their unexpected good performance, and six mentioned the emotions their marks evoked. For Jari, it was "the best thing to happen in the past ten years." Lucy had to check her mark again, for as she said, "I'm doing better than I thought I was capable of doing." The degree of contrast may be best indicated by Arthur's comment: "When I first came back, I was scared about my marks. When I got my midterms I was shocked at my marks. I realized then that if you apply yourself there's nothing you can't do."

The 130 level participants were less exuberant, but were nonetheless pleased with their performance. These learners also were concerned about a history of poor performance in school or their long absence from academic learning. Some were challenged by the difficulty and pace of their courses, and others expected to do well. However, six of the eight participants mentioned doing better than they expected was a high point, expressed as quiet satisfaction or the discovery, "I wasn't as dumb as I thought I was."

(ii) Self-development/self-awareness. Not surprisingly, the idea mentioned with the next highest frequency was commentary clustered around the concepts of self-development and increased self-awareness.

Thirteen participants mentioned both increased awareness of themselves as learners and increased self-esteem. Joan, Max, and Delma discovered that "learning is easier" now that they are "more mature" students; that they want to learn, whereas in high school they had less motivation and self-discipline.

Sandy and Joan recognized their expectations ought to be more realistic. Sandy, affected by test anxiety, said," I think my expectations are way out of bounds for me. I have to learn to loosen up." Joan said that it was a "real adjustment" for her to recognize her limitations in mathematics, and to accept a mark lower than the straight A's she would prefer. Jim and Jari were initially completely caught up in their coursework and drive to excel, but were able to accept the trade-off of more family and personal time for lower marks.

Sandy's high point was the realization that her learning difficulties are related to test anxiety and inappropriate strategies for her learning style, that she is "not stupid." Albert experienced the same liberation in realizing that he also was "not stupid" but suffered from debilitating test anxiety. Lloyd, on the other hand, found he was "not as sharp as [he] thought [he] was." In contrast to his high performance on the job, Lloyd said he was unable to "grasp concepts as easily as [he] did in school."

Participants in all levels also reported increased self-esteem during this round of interviews. For some people, like Sandy and Albert, self-esteem rose as a consequence of discovering they were not "dumb," that test anxiety was the major cause of dissatisfaction with academic performance. Participants in all levels reported increased self-esteem at the discovery of their learning ability. Karolann was pleased to find that she had "still got it" after all these years, Joe and Jim were surprised at how much of their lectures they were able to comprehend, and Bernice was "surprised to realize that [she was] capable of doing what everybody else can do." Ed reported, "I am able to understand everything. I want to go as far as I can and get a good profession. I will accomplish my goal."

Karolann and Maxine noted a sense of self-respect derived from learning toward a better career. As Maxine said, "When you're a cashier and making six bucks an hour--anybody can do that." "People look down on students, too," Karolann added, "but you have self-respect. That's the difference." Maxine responded, "There are so many who say they've been thinking about going back to school but don't think [they] could do it. A lot of people give you a pat on the back because you have the guts. People realize it's not easy to juggle school, work, kids, home, and still have some sanity at the end of the day."

It should be noted that one member in the first round of interviews had withdrawn in the interim. Although Blaine could not be contacted in spite of attempts to do so, his classmates indicated his withdrawal was due in large part to poor performance arising from a learning disability. Their opinion is supported by Blaine's expression of frustration, in the first interview, over the college's lack of support for the learning disabled. In the second week of classes, Blaine said he was already "doing really bad in English." He had come from a program where three teachers and a teacher's aide were available to help him; he now felt the need for "someone who can teach [instructors] there are students in [classrooms] who can't learn properly, that take a little time to learn. [Instructors] need someone to teach them how to deal with these people."

The first round of interviews indicated that the optimism of returning to school, for most participants, was coloured by stress and anxiety. For most of those who remained in the study, though, the initial stress and uncertainty expressed in the first round of interviews was being replaced to large degree by greater self-awareness, confidence, and increased self-esteem.

(iii) Learning is enjoyable/positive attitude to learning. The third idea, seemingly a natural complement to the first two, is that students found learning to be enjoyable, a contrast to the general attitude they held in public school. A positive attitude to learning, reflected in the pleasure at unanticipated good marks mentioned in the first topic, is part of this theme. Participants said that as high school students they attended classes because they had to, but now, as Lucy said, "I'm here because I want to be here."

Twelve members made comments directly related to a positive attitude to learning. Karolann mentioned part of the change is an expanding horizon of possibilities: "You get here and you realize there are things you want to do that you never realized you want to do." She indicated the tentative nature of the back-to-school resolve for many upgrading adults: "I think a lot of us felt that we would give it a try, and if it doesn't work, 'I'm out of here.' But once you get here and it works for you, it gives you more incentive over time." Kari found "knowing you can have fun when you're learning helps relieve a lot of stress."

One aspect of the enjoyment of learning was the supportive environment in the class, a topic discussed more fully below. The 75 level group stated that a high point was "to make a mistake and not be ridiculed," implying they did not feel previous learning had been as supportive. Students in all groups who are also parents found their return served as a positive role model for their children, another indication of a positive attitude to learning.

The last point mentioned in relation to enjoyment of learning is that students reported being "stimulated by learning." Pierre found that a high point was "experiencing new methods of instruction. Joan said, "It's been exciting to have my mind stimulated in a different way -- it's quite different from being in the business world." For her, attending classes after a long absence, the return is "a dream come true." As she said, "I've waited a very long time to come back, so to me it was a dream come true. I was just flying to be back here."

(iv) Improved learning skills. Ten participants reported improved learning skills at this point in the term. In the basic group, Sandy, who suffers test anxiety, "had no idea how to take notes." She had been attempting to memorize all the information from all her courses, "so it was causing [her] a tremendous amount of anxiety." She now was taking better notes, and said, "It's getting better." Max felt he always had good ability but said he did not have good study habits in school. However, he learned he "could do it" and found learning comes "more naturally now than it did in high school" and that he is "willing to work harder, because [he] is more motivated." Jim said that part of his improved learning skill was discovering how to write tests: "I found it really tense the first couple, three, or four weeks, first three or four tests.

After I found out how not to study for a test but to write a test, I started feeling better."

Joe and Henry mentioned the college learning support services helped them develop better learning skills. The Learning Assistance Centre helped Joe develop strategies to analyze word problems in mathematics and to prepare for tests. He also found the Study Hall assistance useful in resolving problems. Henry and Kari applauded the helpfulness of the Learning Resources Centre staff in teaching them to use its reference sources.

Overcoming, or at least coming to terms with, test anxiety and managing stress were other aspects of improved learning skills mentioned during this round of interviews. Both Albert and Sandy had found techniques to help them improve their performance. Albert said, "I'm usually getting around 80%, and before I'd be lucky to get 50%." For Harvey, managing stress became an important skill: "When midterms come up, I get a lot of pains in my neck and around the eyes. I just relieve my stress by running my dog or trying one of those relaxation tapes."

Karolann found transfer of learning to be a significant skill: "What I learn in classes helps in other classes and applies in a lot of areas I never thought would. In English, learning to write papers helped in social studies. In math, [bank] interest is something you can take out and use in your life. In social [studies], I learned all kinds of things I never would have taken an interest in--government issues and such."

(v) Receiving help from students and instructors. This idea, mentioned by ten people, relates to the assistance participants received from both their fellow students and instructors. As well as being surprised by good marks, respondents seemed pleasantly surprised by others' willingness to assist them in their coursework. In the basic group, Harvey noted the warmth and support engendered by such acceptance:

> A lot of them in a higher class, like Math 130, English 130, are really good. They understand what you're going through, and they help you a lot. I have a few friends who are always asking

> me if I need any help with this or that, and it makes me feel really good that they do understand and don't just say, "Well, we went through it, and you'll have to tough it out.

A number of comments were made about the helpfulness of instructional staff at the college. Sandy mentioned the welcome assistance from her English instructor in helping to compensate for her test anxiety and weak learning skills. Joe also noted the helpfulness of his instructors:

> The high point that I found was the difference in instructors [compared] to when I was in high school. The instructors here go out of their way to help you. You can go and see them anytime and they are always willing to help out. When you are in high school they teach you to "Get away from me, I don't want to see you until tomorrow." Here, it is, "If you have a problem, come and see me and we'll spend some time doing it." They have no problem with helping a person out. Especially if you ask.

Seven others commented that a high point in regard to helpful instructors was "being treated as an adult." Jari and Kari appreciated the mutual respect and adult-to-adult relationship they found with their instructors. For Karolann, Kari, and Arthur, a "more personal interest" in education is important, which as Karolann noted makes "most of the difference." Lloyd was buoyed this personal contact as well:

> I had the experience of getting a couple of pats on the back from instructors, something I think most adults are aware of doesn't happen very often. When an instructor would hand back a paper that he graded and said, "You did really good," that was a real pick-up. You are proud of yourself. [I would] go home and brag to my wife.

The high points experienced by students in this study revolved around a cluster of factors related to positive feedback about their performance and the discovery of a supportive learning environment. Those who were anxious about their return to school were elated by their midterm marks and the realization they could develop or renew their learning skills--that they had not lost the ability to learn.

Low Points. In spite of the many high points students experienced, the return to formal learning was not entirely smooth. Most of the low points refer to students' difficulty in adjusting to the pace of instruction; however, one group's unhappiness with an instructor coloured many of their comments.

(i) Feeling overwhelmed/ unable to retain information. Students' memories of their first few weeks in the College Preparatory Program were still fresh. As described in Round One, most students found this time to be quite stressful, and comments in this round reinforced that point. Thirteen students commented directly that they still found the pace of instruction too rapid. As Ed said:

> [There is] so much information to be covered; [the instructors] expect so much from someone who has been out of school for ten-plus years. The first few weeks being a new student overwhelms you how fast the pace is going and the amount of material being covered. I got off to a bad start, and you just have to realize you have to get with it or lose out.

At the senior level, Joe found that keeping up with the class was a challenge as well:

> I was probably spending four to five hours a night, even Saturdays and Sundays, just so I could stay up with the class. It's a one shot deal with me, so I have to be right on top of everything. Because of hitting the math books so much, I started to get behind in English and because of that, the last essay I totally blew because I was working so much on my math and never concentrated on my English.

The rapid pace produced some casualties. Blaine, as discussed earlier, withdrew from college. Sandy reduced her workload, for as she said, "I just found it was really overwhelming, so I dropped my math and science and went out on work experience and I've kept the English going."

As discussed in Round One, returning to school is stressful for adult students, particularly those entering at a lower educational level, or those who have been away from formal learning for an extended period. The first few weeks are trying, and the pace of instruction remains a challenge throughout the term. Bernice may have encapsulated the return-to-school syndrome for many adult students:

> When I first started I felt really overwhelmed with everything. Like I wasn't going to be able to retain it all. Then I would be good for about three days and then all of sudden, I felt overwhelmed again. I would get to know my work, I would know it really well and then all of a sudden would create a block and [I] couldn't remember anything that I learned, so that would cause me to become anxious. That's kind of levelling out with me now. I still get it but not as often.

2. Instructional Methods Which Inhibited Learning.

In this study, the term "instructional methods" was used in the sense of "instructional techniques" as defined by Verner (1964): "The approach employed to accomplish the learning task, such as lecture, small group activity, role play." The elaboration for the question provided a broad range of examples of instructional techniques as a means of clarifying the term; however, the examples may have influenced their responses to some extent.

In answering this question, participants discussed instructional techniques which they found beneficial to their learning, so at times Question Two and Question Three were addressed simultaneously during the interviews. Student responses, though, are grouped under the appropriate question and presented in descending order of frequency.

Generally speaking, the instructional methods students found unhelpful were passive learning activities, such as lectures. Also, student comments were often related to instructor characteristics as well as to instructional techniques. Student comments about unhelpful instructional techniques will be presented first, in Table 11, followed by a discussion of unhelpful instructor characteristics.

Table 11: Unhelpful Instructional Techniques

Technique	Frequency
Lecture	50 level - 0; (n = 9) 75 level - 2; (n = 10) 130 level - 3; (n = 8)
Computer-Managed Instruction	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 3

Unhelpful Instructional Techniques.

(i) Lecture. Little direct discussion of lecture as an instructional technique came out of the groups, with the exception of the senior level. Those in the intermediate group observed that with one instructor lecture was unhelpful because she requested learners not to follow the discussion in the textbook; otherwise, the references to lecture in this round of interviews were fewer than those made during the January interviews. For those in the senior group, the lecture was compared unfavorably to class discussions, as Lloyd stated: "Having class discussions is really helpful, rather than just having a lecture where you have sit and take notes and try and discern what is valuable information and what isn't." Similarly, lecture technique was unhelpful when an instructor used language which differed from that used in the textbooks, as Jim put it: "If you watch what he puts on the board and try and put it into notes and then go back to your text, you are spending twice as much time to confuse yourself." The confusion arose from the discrepancy in language, as Joe pointed out: "You read your text and look at your notes, and none of it jives."

(ii) Computer-managed instruction. Also mentioned as a helpful instructional technique, CML received enough negative comments to include it here as well. The primary dissatisfaction with this instructional technique, as elaborated below, was with the lack of explanation regarding errors.

Unhelpful Instructor Characteristics.

The three topics grouped under this category are summarized in Table 12, and then explained briefly in consequent paragraphs.

Table 12: Unhelpful Instructor Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency
Instructional Pace Too Rapid	50 level - 6; (n = 9) 75 level - 4; (n = 10) 130 level - 6; (n = 8)
Use of Whole-part Explanations	50 level - 3 75 level - 0 130 level - 0
Instructional Language too Sophisticated for Class	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 3

(i) Instructional pace too rapid. As discussed under Question One, the groups generally agreed that a low point was the pace of instruction being too rapid for returning adult learners, some of whom had been away from formal learning for more than ten years. Only four in the intermediate group directly expressed frustration with the pace, but the group generally agreed with these four vocal members.

(ii) Use of whole-part explanations. Participants in the basic group were confused and at times alarmed by explanations which presented both a concept and its context. As Harvey said, "I find when we're on one point, and she tells us *why* we should know this, like for algebra, I find I don't even understand [the initial concept]--you're scaring me."

(iii) Instructional language too sophisticated for class. This characteristic is related to the point discussed earlier that lecture is an unhelpful instructional technique. It also relates to the general feeling at the first of the term that students had to adjust to the language of instruction.

A general agreement among the senior group that instructors "don't talk down to you" was qualified by an example of too-sophisticated language. Three respondents found the language of an instructor impaired their comprehension, and his use of precise diction an impediment. Lloyd said, "He has a problem of coming down to our level, to be eye to eye with us." Each student respected the instructor's knowledge and precise use of terminology; however, Jim felt the level of language for instruction was inappropriate:

> I think of him as an extremely poor instructor for me because he seems so vague. Because he is trying to put this material into different words and I believe because of his qualifications and his intelligence, he expects that we have certain skills and [that] we are fairly intelligent people. I know in class there are a lot of people not really up to snuff. A lot of them are grade school material, not college level students. There are things that he is talking about--concepts, math, particular methods of solving problems--that I am just starting to learn, and for me the class is very difficult. I really enjoy it; I like the subject matter, I like the instructor, but it is very difficult for me because he is vague.

Additional examples of unhelpful characteristics, being unorganized, wasting time, and embarrassing students, were mentioned by the group unhappy with an instructor. Other characteristics were mentioned by only one participant and therefore were seen as a minority view. These points are not discussed further here, since they are fundamental instructional skills or are the obverse of the helpful characteristics discussed below. In general, students were much more expressive of techniques and characteristics they found helpful than of those seen as unhelpful.

3. Which instructional methods have you found most helpful in your learning?

Discussion of this question included comments which may be classified as both instructional techniques and instructor characteristics which enhance learning. Instructional techniques are presented first, summarized in Table 13, followed by a discussion of instructor characteristics.

Table 13: Helpful Instructional Techniques

Activity	**Frequency**
Small Group Work	50 level - 4; (n = 9) 75 level - 1; (n = 10) 130 level - 8; (n = 8)
Large Group Activities	50 level - 4 75 level - 5 130 level - 4
Lecture with Provided Notes	50 level - 0 75 level - 1 130 level - 2
Computer-Managed Instruction	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 3

Helpful instructional techniques.

(i) Small group activity. The most commonly mentioned helpful instructional technique was small group activity, particularly by the basic and senior groups. Although two students found groups unhelpful because of unequal participation or dysfunctional group dynamics, the majority stated that group work helped them to learn faster, understand the material better, and retain information better, as had been expressed in round one. Group work also helped reduce stress for these anxious learners, and the social aspect of group work made learning a more enjoyable activity. They also pointed out that learning to work effectively in groups was a valuable employment skill, what Jim called "preparation for real life." For example, Sandy said,

> In science, we did a few things together as a group, and it was great. When I'm doing something with somebody else, if I don't understand it, somebody else does, and we sort of balance it off. I remember it better it that way.

Lloyd felt the same way about the effectiveness of small groups for learning: "Working in small groups is not only taking in information, but I find you learn more when you talk. You learn more because of it." Bernice mentioned the reduction in stress: "I think when you work with someone else the stress is gone. If I'm under stress I can't retain anything, but working with someone else removes some of that stress and therefore I remember it better." Students in the basic level had written tests in groups, and unanimously found this unusual experience reduced stress, improved learning, and increased retention.

Small group presentations also received special mention. Joan and Max felt that presentations were useful to overcome shyness and develop public speaking skills. Delma noted that she and other students found it easier to speak out in class when a topic had first been discussed among themselves because "you had the whole group behind you."

Others recognized the importance of active learning occasioned by small group work. Sharene pointed out: "It may be [the instructor] has us in groups because we get lazy and depend on her too much. We are capable of doing the work on our own, but it's so easy to understand her teaching." Students recognized the value of small group work and formed study groups on their own outside of class time, as did Joan, Max, Rosh and Harvey.

(ii) Large group activities. After small group activity, large group activities, which included working at the blackboard, class discussion, and role playing, were identified as being useful for learning. Students mentioned that working out problems at the blackboard was useful for pointing out errors in their thinking, and for involving the whole class in an activity. Max thought this activity benefited both the individual and the whole class by pointing out common errors and misconceptions. Ed said those who were called to the front had "an incentive to want to know" to avoid the embarrassment of being unable to do the work. Irene stated that her classmates would help those at the board, and Lori noted that "others do not laugh at you." Under these circumstances, boardwork became a class guided-practice activity with collaboration and support from classmates. Even those sitting at their desks were involved, as Harvey described: "When you're sitting down and the other person is writing, you find, 'Oh yeah, I never noticed that before.' You had it wrong on your paper, but when you're watching them up there, you notice [their errors]."

Class discussion was valued for the opportunity to hear others' ideas, for the ease of contribution, and the opportunity "to get our viewpoints in." For Delma, such discussion at times gave her cause to re-examine her thinking on a topic; at other times it bolstered her confidence in her thinking.

Role playing was mentioned only four times, but with conviction of its usefulness in learning concepts, understanding literature, and experiential learning.

(iii) Lecture with provided notes. Only three people mentioned lecture as a useful instructional technique, provided lecture notes were written on the blackboard. Two of the three found the technique "useful," but preferred the more active techniques described above. For Delma, however, the lecture-with-notes was her preference; the notes gave her material for later review.

(iv) Computer-managed instruction. Only students in the senior level had any experience with CML, which was used in mathematics and as English grammar review. Responses reflected both sides of the computer-based learning argument. Joe disliked the computer for the lack of explanation and instruction when wrong answers were entered: "it just tells you that you are wrong and not what you did wrong, so you have to go back over everything." Lloyd liked the novelty and self-paced nature of the computer courses: "If you wanted to finish within two weeks, you could have done so rather than take four months." Those who obtained ready instructional assistance found the CML approach "very straight-forward and easy to understand."

Helpful instructor characteristics. Some participants' responses to Question Three may be categorized as instructor characteristics rather than than instructional techniques. Rather than describe a type of activity used to learn information, students described instructors' attitudes toward learners or curriculum content which they found helpful. These instructional characteristics are summarized in Table 14, and described below.

Table 14: Helpful Instructor Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency
Treats Learners as Adults/ Respected as a Person	50 level - 0; (n = 9) 75 level - 15; (n = 10) 130 level - 3; (n = 8)
Shows a Personal Interest in Students' Learning and Success	50 level - 1 75 level - 4 130 level - 0
Provides for Initial Success	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 2
Indicates Important Information	50 level - 3 75 level - 2 130 level - 0
Helps Learners Become Acquainted with Each Other	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 3
Presents Point-by-Point/Step-by-Step Instructions	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 0

(i) Treats learners as adults/respected as a person. This characteristic was emphasized by the intermediate group who were unhappy with an instructor they felt did not treat them as adults nor respect them as individuals. Their comments reflect experience with other instructors this group felt were providing appropriate instruction. These "other" instructors, Luke mentioned, "treat us like adults," where the one instructor "treats us like high school kids." Kari felt the other instructors "want to see you pass and succeed" whereas the one "just doesn't really care," according to Luke. Karolann said, "[Instructor] treats you like a person, like his equal. You're on the same level as him. It's not like teacher to student--it's like adult to adult." The consequence, for Karolann, is that "you feel more comfortable and relaxed, and it makes your whole learning experience a lot easier."

Being treated with respect was mentioned again as a contrast in instructors' attitudes to learners. Kari said, "It's insulting to have someone argue with you when you're right, and when [he realizes] you're right, he admits he's wrong [but] acts as if it were no big deal."

(ii) Shows a personal interest in students' learning and success. The same group were in greatest agreement that the instructor's personal interest in students' learning and success was important. Ed said, "If the instructor seems genuine about wanting you to get through the course with a good grade, then you will go after class and get the help you need to do that." Karolann mentioned that personal interest was more important than instructional technique:

> We had three teachers that used basically the same technique, and two have positive results, and one doesn't get anywhere. It depends a lot upon the teacher's motive, the reason they're there, and their personal interest.

(iii) Provides for initial success. Luke provided a negative example of this characteristic. As previously discussed, participants found the rapid pace of their courses rather hectic, with little time to adjust. Positive feedback about initial performance was important for Luke:

> I think it just runs you down after the first three weeks or a month. You see the results you get from the course--you think, "Oh my God, I'm doing so poorly, and the rest of the semester you think that way.

Similarly, Joan found the initial negative feedback in a biology laboratory class unsettling:

> The first few times it was very frustrating because we would think that we were giving her what she wanted, and for about the first three or four it wasn't what she wanted, and then she would get frustrated. We just didn't understand what it was she was trying to communicate to us.

Max's experience was a contrast: "I had a different instructor. He said, 'This is how I would like you to do [laboratory reports].' He worked with us and didn't mark us as hard if we didn't [initially] do it the way he expected it. It was a gradual thing, which was nice."

(iv) Indicates important information. Three people in the basic level group indicated the value of having noteworthy information pointed out. For example, Sandy said, "If it's something we have to remember, our instructor puts it in such a way that you pick up real fast we should remember. I find that's really helpful for me." Irene added that her English instructor "is repetitious. She'll tell us what to note, or will give us notes to copy down." Harvey indicated that students in many cases have not developed skill in identifying important points, and rely on the instructor to highlight important information.

(v) Helps learners become acquainted with each other. The importance of the social dimension of learning is highlighted by consensus of the value of group activities, as discussed earlier under "Instructional Techniques." Direct mention of instructors' deliberate intervention to establish acquaintance among students is limited to the three participants in the senior group, however. Sharene brought up the contrast she found between a class which fostered student acquaintance and another, outside the college, where no such attempt was made:

> In English, everybody knows each other's names. About four of us do the computer [grammar review] together, and we go for coffee and do this and that together. But in Math we just go to class. The majority hates that class. We just go and we leave. There's too much pressure on that one class for us. There's no time to be social because we're concentrating on what we're doing. I think that makes it a lot harder. The group is so much fun and helps to learn.

Joan also mentioned the value of a get-acquainted activity in an English class, "so that people were comfortable. Once you are comfortable, you learn a lot more." Max had to revise his timetable, but was so taken with meeting others in an icebreaker exercise that he "kept switching classes until [he] could get into her class . . . [he] wanted it so badly because of that [get-acquainted activity]."

(vi) Presents point-by-point or step-by-step instructions. Two learners in the 50-level group stated that they understood better when the instructor presented a concept, as Bernice explained, "step by step, almost like a Grade One would need." Sandy's needs were similar: "I have to be shown step by step, and I have to get the first step before I can go on to the next step."

4. Changes in Expectations Regarding Good Instruction?

Responses to this question were few. Most participants had already stated their discoveries about themselves as learners as "high points" in Question One. Comments provided in March are first summarized in Table 15, and then discussed as a single topic rather than subdividing them into sub-topics. The question was asked again in May, however, to discover participants' observations in this regard.

Table 15: Changes in Expectations Regarding Good Instruction

Topic	Frequency
Students, At Times, Must Learn in Spite of Instructor	50 level - 10; (n = 9) 75 level - 0; (n = 10) 130 level - 0; (n = 8)
Personal Approach with Students	50 level - 3 75 level - 0 130 level - 2
Application More Important than Rote Memorization	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 0
Active Learning Techniques	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 1

The 50-level group mostly described what they liked about instructors rather than noting changes in their preferences. Rosh pointed out that as a learner, "you have to get along with the instructor, you have to be his or her student. It doesn't matter if [the instructor] teaches me good or bad, I can study or get help from other people. Sometimes you haven't any choice--you can't change your instructor." The group agreed that the onus is on the learner to adapt to the instructor, rather than the instructor adapting to the learners.

Five participants commented on the value of personal interaction with instructors. Jeremy noted that in spite of Rosh's point, the instructor must also get along with the students and should "have a sense of humor, relate to how they think, stuff like that." For Joan, the ability to be personable is important enough that instructors should make concerted attempts to learn this skill, and Delma found "the instructors easier to talk to, on an adult basis."

For Bernice, one of the older participants, application of learning was useful for her:

> I don't see any reason for all the memory work we have to do. In science, we have to remember the formula. If I need it, I can carry the formula around on a cue card for the rest of my life. The same in English--the definitions of prepositional phrases. When I'm out of school, I won't have to go around telling people what a prepositional phrase is, but if I can apply it and use it, I will automatically apply it and improve my writing without consciously knowing I'm doing it.

Max stated that although he was unsure of what to expect, he had found that what worked for him were active learning techniques such as small group work, and work on the board.

The absence of analysis regarding changes in expectations may be due to students' preoccupation with simply staying abreast of course work, as indicated by Max's comment: "I didn't know what to expect in instructional methods. I was more afraid of, 'Was I going to be able to learn? Keep up with the pace?' I don't think I really thought much about the method as such." Another reason for this brevity is implied by Sandy: "It has been so long since I was in school, I wouldn't know what is a good instructor or a bad instructor. "

In this round students did not note many changes in expectations regarding instruction. This question received more attention in May.

Third Round Interviews

The last round of interviews was conducted in May, approximately one month after winter term classes had ended. Without a common timetable, fewer people were available to meet in large groups as had been done earlier, so most interviews were conducted with either small groups or individuals. The same format used in earlier rounds, of allocating a fixed time per question for group discussions, was followed here for this round. Individual interviews, conducted in person and via telephone, were not under the same time constraints, but followed the same question sequence.

Questions in this round repeated those asked in January, as a means of comparing any changes in attitudes or perceptions. In the discussion below all themes identified in May are described, but only corresponding themes from January are presented. The full list of January themes have been presented earlier. As before, responses are in declining order of frequency.

Participant Characteristics

Most students were now quite confident and relaxed in the college, as if they had found a niche in the institution and were confident of their success in their studies. The number of participants at the senior level remained unchanged from the first round in January, as did the females in the intermediate level, but the number of males in the intermediate group had dropped from 6 to 3. In the basic level, the number of males had dropped from 7 to 3; female participants were reduced by 1, from 4 to 3. Students were away working on summer jobs either outside the province, or on work schedules which did not permit interviews either in person or by telephone. The number of participants is presented in Table 1 on page 30.

Interview Data

1. End of Term Perceptions About Returning to School

As may be expected, perceptions in May differed from those of January, when students were first experiencing the confusion of adjusting to a new environment and new expectations. Both the sense of optimism and stress expressed in the first interview were muted at this time. Responses have again been grouped into categories, tabulated in Table 16, and topics created within each category. Blank cells in the table indicate that no corresponding topic was mentioned.

Table 16: Perceptions of Returning Adult Students
January and May Responses

January		May	
Topic	**Frequency**	**Topic**	**Frequency**
Adjusting to Academic Environment	50 level - 5 75 level - 4 130 level - 5	More Confident	50 level - 4; (n = 6) 75 level - 6; (n = 9) 130 level - 8; (n=10)
		More Comfortable	50 level - 4 75 level - 8 130 level - 7
Challenge to Self-Esteem	50 level - 2 75 level - 2 130 level - 9	Increased Self-Esteem	50 level - 2 75 level - 3 130 level - 3
Increased Self-Esteem	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 1		
Sense of Positive Future	50 level - 1 75 level - 4 130 level - 6	New Horizons Opened	50 level - 0 75 level - 4 130 level - 1
General Entry Anxiety	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 5	Stressful, Tough, Disappointing	50 level - 3 75 level - 1 130 level - 2

Feel good about returning to school.

(i) More confident. At the close of the term, students in all levels generally felt more confident in their abilities. The stress and uncertainty expressed in the first round was generally replaced by a sense of confidence based on having experienced the stresses of one term in the college, familiarity with the physical and academic environment, and having made friends with classmates. John, one of the older students, found he was no longer intimidated by the younger students in his class, for as he said, "At the start, the younger ones thought they were smart, now they're not there." He found that he gained confidence as he got older, that he was able to make "connections" with course content on his own, and if he did not understand, he felt confident enough after the first week to ask questions. Both Bernice and Albert felt that the next term would be easier, since they now knew what was required of them.

The intermediate group also expressed a general sense of increased confidence after the term. Karolann initially found the return to school "very frightening" for "you doubt everything from your ability to get along with people to learning to getting lost in the hallways." She was now certain that returning was "the right thing to do," and said that her initial doubt and fright had been replaced by confidence. Her feelings of guilt over leaving her children at home were replaced with an improved relationship with them. Arthur and Maxine also found life as a student was "easier," partly, as Maxine mentioned, because they now had some background knowledge and knew what to expect.

The senior group expressed the same feelings of increased confidence, adding to the comments of the others that familiarity with building layout, with college policies and procedures, and improved test-taking skills would make future terms easier. Joan added that the transition to school was "horrendous" because of the shift from business to an academic environment and unfamiliar surroundings. Making friends with classmates was also important to many participants, for they now felt more comfortable in the college. The contrast may be summed up by Bernice's statement: "When I first came, it was scary. I didn't know where to go, what to do, or how to act or look--I didn't know anything. That's scary in itself. Not knowing how to study anymore or take notes, etcetera. That will come easier next term."

(ii) Increased self-esteem. Related to the feeling of increased confidence was the feeling of increased self-esteem reported by learners. John for example, finished the term with higher marks than he had originally planned to earn, and noticed that he was now able to get information out of a lecture, whereas before he did not care about learning.

Karolann also noticed increased self-esteem: "I gained a sense of pride in myself. It changed me as a person in a lot of ways, helped me get my priorities straight." When asked if going back was more than the knowledge presented in the course content, she replied, "That was only a small part of it. It was a lot of gaining self-respect in my abilities to be a functioning part of society, a sense of pride you're doing something with your life. For me, that's a big deal." Kari found increased self esteem in being treated as an adult:

> I didn't know I could make it through school. I thought it would be the same thing as when I was going to school when I was younger and not wanting to do it. But the teachers don't treat you like kids, so it helps. There's a lot more responsibility, which means you want to take on a lot more.

For Ed, increased self-esteem was implied in his revised career plans: "The thought of a profession rather than a trade is really quite exciting. I hope to get my B. Ed. and work with children, and it would be emotionally rewarding."

(iii) More comfortable. In addition to feelings of increased confidence and self-esteem derived from successful completion of the term, participants now felt more comfortable in the college, partly because of increased familiarity with the physical layout of the college, and having made friends with classmates.

Irene, who was ready to return to classes, said her "fellow students were great, teachers and other students were willing to help you," and that she "enjoyed the entire atmosphere of [the college]."

Nikki and others in the intermediate group were more comfortable because "everybody's at the same level you are," trying to get an education, wanting to be in school. In the same vein, Lucy mentioned that returning students now have a different attitude:

> We are willing to learn now, whereas we weren't before. Here if you want help, you get it. Everywhere you go there is help, and it just makes me want to be here. If you don't understand something, [the instructor] won't laugh at you because you don't understand it--she'll help you.

Although mentioned directly by only two students, the ability to draw upon life experiences to enhance learning is part of the "different attitude" mentioned by several other participants and is one of the distinguishing characteristics of adult learners. Using life experiences to enhance learning helped some participants feel good about returning to school. John, who had been away 38 years, found that he had learned through the "process of life." He said he was "able to put the experiences of life into reality and practice" and felt the "capacity to learn grows" as one ages. He therefore was now not intimidated by younger students or his instructors.

Maxine felt more comfortable in the college because she found her life experience now made learning easier for her: "Over the years I've picked up background knowledge that I didn't realize was there and how it's being brought out through different subjects."

Participants in the senior group also mentioned the comfort derived from familiarity with the academic cycle, but Joe added that being a student is now easier with the discovery of "options that helped make learning easier" like the Learning Assistance Centre, which showed "how to set up so your studying time is not wasted time, how to take notes, how to take exams."

(iv) New horizons opened. The topics discussed above indicate a general sense of optimism and confidence as participants adjusted to the college environment and the demands of their studies. In January, the interviews revealed a general optimism over improved employment opportunities as a consequence of improved education. In this round, direct mention of improved employment opportunities were fewer, but did come out of comments in two groups.

As mentioned earlier, Ed was excited about being in a profession rather than a trade, and was looking forward to a "stable environment." Kari was more direct in her statement: "Eventually you're going to be able to look at your paycheque and say, 'That's what it's all about.' Not having to worry about where your next meal is coming from." Nikki described herself as "almost brain dead" and as a consequence felt she was ready to come back to "learn and become something." Maxine contrasted work with the optimism of being in school: "You get another job and you think 'What am I doing in this job?' You don't feel good about it. You go to school and you start thinking, 'I'm doing this for myself. I'm going to make a better life for myself.'"

Feeling uncertain about returning.

For some participants, the experience of the term did not remove some of the initial anxiety mentioned in January. Their comments have been grouped under one general category.

(i) Stressful, tough, disappointing. Bernice and Sandy each found the term stressful, for different reasons. Bernice said, "I was on an adrenaline high, and noticed that it took two weeks after being away from the college to unwind. I was totally tired all the time, like I hadn't slept for months. I'm kind of dreading coming back again. I want to, but I found it very stressful." Sandy said she felt like Bernice: "I found three courses absolutely overwhelming for me, so by January I decided to drop two courses. I resented time away from my family to study."

Like Sandy, Geri said the term was "a lot tougher than I thought it would be. Seems like such a rat race. When you're in the workforce you leave your work at work, but when you're in school you still go to midnight at times." Albert found being in classes "hard on friendships" in what he termed "life B," that it was "hard to regulate yourself with homework and review."

Three participants found the experience of the first term to be disappointing. Sandy and Bernice, both older female participants, expressed dissatisfaction with the requirement to take a general education program. Bernice said, "I'm an older person now, so I don't want to waste any time. Teach me basic skills needed for [my particular] training and [let me] get out of here and get on with my life." Bernice's career plan was to be a Dental Assistant; she wanted to acquire only the requisite skills for that occupation. As she said, "Once you have forty years of life experience and skills, I feel it is a waste of time learning math and English when it won't be required on the job." Sandy agreed:

> I feel a lot like Bernice does, [that] life experience and job experience should count. As I said last time, "give us guidance

> and direction, test us to see where we fit in and say, 'Here is what things you have to do, what you need,' and not let us go through things we may not have to use." After forty, I don't want to spend two years just getting Grade 12 and then [still have] another two years to go.

Pierre was a little disappointed in his slow progress in developing fluency in English, particularly since he keenly felt the loss of time: "I know I have lost at least six months, and six months at my age has much more value than for a teenager."

Jim was also concerned over loss of time, particularly since his application to a technical institute had been placed on a waiting list:

> I'm in a bind here. I'm not getting any younger, and it's cost me a considerable amount of dollars to be out of the work force. I got a better education out of it, but will I be able to apply it in the future? Or should I go back to what I was doing before? Should I have been working, getting in time with the company?

Most participants seemed to have overcome the stress of the first weeks of class and now felt comfortable in the college environment. The sense of optimism about their careers and education remained; however, the concerns expressed by the older students echoed those expressed in the first round regarding the desirability of individualized and self-paced instruction as a means of reducing the time spent learning.

2. What Policies, Facilities, and Services Should the College Provide?

Responses to this question, summarized in Table 17, indicated that students generally would agree with Lloyd's statement that institutional policies and facilities were "comprehensive, accessible, and helpful." As well, Karolann mentioned that the college need not do more, that it was up to the student to learn how to make life easier. However, some comments pointed to possible changes in college services. Highest mention was made of the need for an improved orientation program which would identify the services available to new students, such as the Learning Assistance Centre, with its tutoring and study skills programs, or the use of recreation facilities. Ed suggested that the Registrar's Office send out an "adult returning to school" package to inform new students about financial assistance, registration procedures, book purchasing, and generally what to expect during the first days of classes. Another suggestion was to have former students tell incoming students what to expect upon their return, particularly about the rapid pace of the courses.

Students also felt the college could help more with the registration procedure, either by providing a "guided tour" for first time students, by posting a "step by step guide to registration," or by having experienced students help newcomers through registration. This suggestion relates directly to the initial stress students found during the registration process in January.

Shorter, direct employment preparation courses were suggested by Sandy and Bernice, who felt older learners could apply previously acquired life experience and therefore need learn only employment-specific skills. Similarly, Geri would like to see sponsoring agencies remove requirements to take courses not directly related to career plans, for as she said, "I am wasting a lot of time and money in things that I don't need."

Joe suggested that entrance placement tests could be more accurate in placing students in appropriate levels, for some students placed in Mathematics 130 were unable to add fractions.

By the end of the term, most participants agreed that the college provided sufficient learning support, but the institution could provide more information to help students make use of its services and facilities. Students seemed to have developed the attitude that they require determination and a certain amount of independence to be successful. As Lucy pointed out, "I think they expect us as adults that we have to take on the responsibility ourselves. They are not teaching children. We are supposed to be able to think for ourselves."

Table 17: Perceptions Re College Support for Learners
Comparison of January and May Responses

January		May	
Topic	**Frequency**	**Topic**	**Frequency**
Orientation Information	50 level - 1 75 level - 8 130 level - 4	More Comprehensive Orientation	50 level - 3; (n=6) 75 level - 1; (n=9) 130 level - 7; (n=10)
Information re Department Policies	50 level - 0 75 level - 7 130 level - 0		
Registration Procedure Information	50 level - 0 75 level - 6 130 level - 4	Help with the registration process	50 level - 3 75- level - 2 130 level - 2

2. Helpful Instructional Techniques.

In many ways, student responses to this question did not vary a great deal from those given in January, although the tone of their answers carried the conviction of the term's experience. As well, many comments described instructor characteristics rather than instructional techniques. The discussion of instructional techniques, presented first in Table 18, is followed by an explanation of helpful instructor characteristics.

Table 18: Helpful Instructional Techniques
January and May Responses

January		May	
Technique	**Frequency**	**Technique**	**Frequency**
Small Group Activities	50 level - 8 75 level - 5 130 level - 6	Small Group Activities	50 level - 3; (n=6) 75 level - 4; (n=9) 130 level - 9; (n=10)
Class Discussion	50 level - 8 75 level - 5 130 level - 6	Brief Lecture with Class Discussion	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 4
Role Plays	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 2	Role Plays	50 level - 1 75 level - 2 130 level - 3
		Brief, Purposeful Lectures	50 level - 0 75 level - 4 130 level - 1
Appeal to More Than One Sense	50 level - 5 75 level - 1 130 level - 4	Visual Presentations and Practical Applications	50 level - 2 75 level - 7 130 level - 2

Instructional techniques.

(i) Small group activities. As in January, students felt that small group activities were the best way to help adults learn. Bernice maintained that discussion with fellow students helped: "The instructor might tell me and tell me, and I still don't get it. But if I ask a student who says, 'Do it like this,' it clicks." Bernice's elaboration repeated the idea expressed in January that instructors may use too complicated or sophisticated explanations:

> Instructors usually have an educated way of instructing, but I am not an educated student, so I don't understand this educated way, but a *Sesame Street* way. Keep it simple. I don't have to know "why" all this, but if the steps are very simple, I will remember it. [If the instructor puts] all that other stuff in there --I'm lost.

Arthur noted the greater ease of communication among students: "You are going to relate more to a student because you will not be shy to ask a student his point of view. Whereas, if just starting here, you might shy away from asking your instructor. You'd feel like a dummy."

The 130-level participants generally reiterated the comments made by those in the other two groups, that group work was "lots of fun," "nicer and more comfortable for adults" and that therefore students learned better. Geri said "hearing others' opinions helped," and that she found it easier to speak up as part of a group:

> In class I wouldn't speak up because the class was so big and in case I was wrong, even if I knew the answer. And you get [embarrassed]. But if there were four or five of us working in a group I'd speak my mind and then say what I thought.

(ii) Brief lecture with class discussion. Active learner roles were included in the next most frequently mentioned instructional technique as well. Participants from the two higher levels found that an opportunity to discuss lecture material and question the instructor during a lecture was useful. Karolann said, "I really liked open class discussion. You feel you can keep up with what she's talking about and not miss a point." Class discussion also provides other perspectives, as Lucy mentioned: "I get other opinions and other ways of thinking about a certain topic. That way if my thinking is hard nosed or needs some change, then I've got other facts to base it on; a lot easier for me to change my opinion if it is wrong or hard nosed." Joe preferred a combination of brief lectures and working in groups:

> I found that working in groups is a lot more helpful than just sitting there listening to the teacher. A student would excel much faster if they do work in groups, because not only are you learning, but you're also helping other students, which means you're teaching, and the more you talk about it the more you actually learn.

Joan noted that without class discussion, "lots of times you don't realize you're having problems until you're at home. And then I have no one to help [me]."

(iii) Role plays. As in January, role play was listed as a helpful instructional technique, this time by all three levels. Sandy said that role plays add variety, more fun, and help learners "remember better." In fact, Lucy said she could not understand a concept in social studies until a role play helped "pretend it is really happening. I caught on so much faster. I put myself in that position." Karolann noted that role playing aided recall and retention because she could visualize the process and identify classmates with a particular role.

(iv) Brief, purposeful lectures. Although most students preferred active learning, some in the intermediate and senior courses found lectures to be an efficient means to provide information. Joan stated, "Lectures are very helpful in the right context, [such as] when [the instructor is] introducing a new topic. You have to have information to assimilate it." Rita and Joan found that lectures "worked well" and that they "learned well just listening and taking notes." Delma experienced mostly lecture techniques and "liked the notes [instructors] gave -- if they were good lecturers."

(v) Other instructional techniques. Visual presentation in the form of slides, video, and overhead transparencies were noted as helpful to "create a picture I can actually see." Bernice said she learned better when she could "see what is happening, not someone just saying so and you agreeing. I knew the answer, but had to see it on the board."

Techniques which demonstrate practical application were cited by three participants in the intermediate level. Nikki commented, "It has to have use to us in real life We have spent time in the work force, all lived lives--I don't buy this abstract garbage anymore. It has got to have some practical use."

Working at the blackboard was mentioned as being a useful technique to help learners retain information, for it "forces you to think," according to Albert. Lloyd, too, found the use of blackboard demonstrations useful in mathematics to illustrate problem-solving methods.

Using a variety of techniques was mentioned generally as a means to reduce boredom and increase interest.

Helpful Instructor Characteristics.

Helpful instructor characteristics (see Table 19) did not change significantly from those listed in January, but the May list is somewhat shorter. The first item in the list is attributable in part to the dissatisfaction that the intermediate group felt with one particular instructor. Other comments are more evenly distributed among the three levels.

Table 19: Helpful Instructor Characteristics

January		May	
Characteristic	Frequency	Characteristic	Frequency
Avoid a Whole-Part Approach	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 0	Structured Classroom Activity and Lectures	50 level - 0; (n=6) 75 level - 6; (n=9) 130 level - 0; (n=10)
Indicate Important Ideas	50 level - 1 75 level - 0 130 level - 3	Adjusts Pace to Suit Learners Needs	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 3
Get-Acquainted with Classmates	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 2	Respects Learners as Adults and as Individuals	50 level - 1 75 level - 2 130 level - 2
		Uses Language Appropriate for Learners	50 level - 2 75 level - 1 130 level - 1
Repetition and Review	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 3		
		Available for Consultation Outside Class Hours	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 0

(i) Structured classroom activity and lectures. Students in the 75-level commented on the importance of classroom structure to facilitate their learning and to help them manage their time more effectively. Ed, for example, stated, "It is easier to go from A to Z instead of jumping all over. It was hard to prepare for and know where you've been." Karolann contrasted two different courses: "In [Course A] there was a definite flow of information. You could understand it and keep up with it. In [Course B] the way information was presented, it was very hard to keep up, connect it, and have the same flow and understand it." Nikki said, "I need structure in a classroom. I am an unstructured person and cannot cope with someone else's unstructuredness." Maxine agreed, but for different reasons: "I need organization. I do everything that way--I have to or my life goes into chaos. I need to know what I'm doing in class--know what to read, so I can talk about it, go home and do what I've got to do and I am fine."

(ii) Adjusts pace to suit learners' needs. Earlier in the term, students had commented on the stress caused by trying to learn and keep up with course content. In this round, students' comments seemed to imply a willingness to try to keep up. The rapid pace should be mediated by instructor organization, as Ed pointed out, "Going through the material at 110 miles per hour where an adult should know beforehand what is coming so you can read ahead and prepare yourself mentally for it." Another mediation would be, as Joan said, "presenting the material clearly at whatever pace that takes--sometimes it means going slowly over more difficult things."

Participants at the senior level also addressed the problem of pace. Henry felt the pace was manageable, "if you were always there," but couldn't believe how much he had missed when absent for two days. Geri found "everything moved so quickly. You'd be moving onto something else and not really grasp what you had just taken. But that's what studying is for." Joan had the unhappy experience of being tested on material which was not discussed in class because of the pressure to move on to new topics.

These learners felt the pace should be adapted to the comprehension ability of the students.

(iii) Respects learners as adults and as individuals. Being treated as an adult and being respected as an individual mean different things to different students, but their presence enhances student motivation and pleasure in learning. For Albert, Joan, and Max, allocating time for getting acquainted with other students was "really helpful" and "made a big difference" in that it "pulls the class together as a group."

Whereas Karolann and Kari felt insulted at being not treated as adults and individuals, Karolann was motivated by an instructor who was "very encouraging and didn't make [her] feel belittled." She then contrasted this instructor with another for whom she did not feel motivated to work: "When I went to discuss anything with her I came away feeling insulted as a person."

Discussed at length during the two previous interview rounds, the importance of being treated as adults had not diminished in students' perceptions of good instruction.

(iv) Uses language appropriate for learners. Although mentioned only four times during this round, the significance of using appropriate language was discussed in each preceding round. For Bernice, a technique that would help her learn is "if teachers can bring themselves down to the students' level. They know this and can do it quickly. They can't understand why you don't know it, but it is the first time for you, and maybe the five hundredth for them." Bernice and Sandy also mentioned an aspect of appropriate language in their need for "step by step instructions," rather than extensive explanations. Bernice said she "could care less" about theoretical constructs, "just show me how to get through the first step, then the next step, and I will get it." Geri had an instructor who "spoke at too high a level. I thought it was just me, but I asked a half dozen people and they all said it went over their heads."

(v) Available for consultation outside class hours. Mentioned considerably in March, instructor availability was mentioned only twice in May when Kari and Ed referred to the value of consultation with a mathematics instructor outside of class time.

3. Changes in Perceptions Regarding Appropriate Instructional Techniques

Although the question referred to appropriate techniques, students generally compared their initial expectations to the reality they encountered in the classroom. As such, their answers indicate the attitude of incoming adult learners regarding instructional techniques rather than their evaluation of what constitutes effective instruction. Fourteen respondents mentioned a change in their perceptions of instructional techniques. The second part of the question was not addressed in depth; instead, students gave their opinions of what they had experienced.

Instructional expectations were changed. The majority of participants changed their perceptions of instructional techniques over the term (see Table 20). Most expected either a stereotypical classroom or a version of their high school experience. In many instances the initial impression was one of fear and uncertainty.

John, for example, expected a movie version of college, which he felt would be "boring and kind of scary" with "expectations a mile high." He said the reality was "totally different. The instructor was quite friendly and outgoing; he told you what was expected, and the rest was up to you. You were treated as an adult--you did not have to ask to leave the room or anything like that." Albert expected upgrading to be like high school, but did not expect a get-acquainted activity or "people helping people."

Irene's preconceptions, which she later found to be baseless, were more unnerving. She had been told the instructors were "real nasty, you had better do as you are told." She expected "sergeants with a whip--a nightmare." Furthermore, she said, "I was told there were two-hour classes, and the teachers stand there and lecture. They lecture for fifteen minutes and then leave, and you do the rest of the class yourself. I had a real fear." Similarly, Bernice had been informed that expectations would be high: "I was told I would have three to four hours homework for every class. I was petrified when I came here. I was committed, scared, wondering if I was capable of doing what had to be done."

Kari described intimidating preconceptions as well: "I thought it would be like school was before: 'I'm the big person, you're the little person.'" However, she found it "a pleasant surprise to be treated as an adult, because it makes you want to learn. If you're both on the same level, it makes it a lot easier to get your point across and for them to get their point across to you." Others said they did not know what to expect other than fear at the unknown, but many expected the usual lecture approach seen on television and in the movies: "the professor up there lecturing and me yawning."

Karolann began the term resolved not to enjoy being in upgrading, partly because she had been "a little bit frightened" by a friend. She expected that the instructors didn't care, "they just pile on the homework." The reality was different:

> I came here with the preconceived idea it was going to be straightforward and I would not form such a relationship with my instructors. I hadn't anticipated that at all. I thought it would be just--come here, read the books, and bang, bang, bang. I didn't want to have fun; I didn't think it was going to be fun. But that was something--how involved the instructors actually are in your learning. The instructors are likable people. They are very open about themselves and they encourage you to be open.

Students in the 130 groups held similar expectations of stereotypical instructors. Henry, Lloyd, Rita, Max, Jim and others all expected "mostly lectures," but also found the reality unexpectedly pleasant. Jim did not expect learning to be enjoyable: "I didn't know what to expect, so nothing changed because I didn't know what to expect. [It was different] in more one-to-one with instructors. It was a lot more fun than what I remember from high school days." Max appreciated the difference from his high school experience as well, particularly the "willingness of instructors to help and their stressing 'Come see me at my office.' Even their phone numbers are given. That took the stress away, and helped you to understand information more. You knew if you had problems you could get an answer for it." Carola's response may be representative:

> I didn't have expectations as far as technique went, except fear of starting with a classroom of strangers. I expected the old

> schoolroom atmosphere of teacher, Mr. So-and-So, and I as student. Instead, as an adult student, we address each other by first names, [there is a] relaxed adult level--nice, but not anticipated. It meant teachers recognized me on an adult level which nurtures my own self-esteem, so [I] become more confident in learning.

Table 20: Changes in Perceptions Re Instructional Techniques

YES	NO
50 level - 4; (n = 6)	50 level - 1
75 level - 4; (n = 9)	75 level - 0
130 level - 6; (n = 10)	130 level - 2

Instructional Expectations Were Unchanged Three participants' expectations of instructional techniques were met. Although Bernice's expectation of extensive homework assignments was not met, she felt returning to the college was "like [being] a kid actually. Parents control, and [that experience] hasn't changed. You are still very controlled and if you don't meet our standards, you're out." Bernice's attitude was shaped in part by the experience of an acquaintance who had not been successful:

> She was trying hard, but she had to quit because she did not meet the standards. Now, her self-esteem is back down probably further than it was before she got here. She probably classifies herself as a real failure. If that happened to me, I would be devastated.

Delma found the instructional techniques "pretty much what I expected," and Geri felt the same way, "except the pace was very rapid."

Adult students carried with them expectations of college based on their sometimes negative experiences in the public school, or on portrayals of academia in popular media. This attitude created stress at the beginning of the term; however, students were surprised and pleased at being treated as adults and at enjoying the learning experience.

4. Would You Have Wanted to Decide Course Content?

As in January, the response to this question was generally a definite "No." The categories of responses were fewer in May, but the reasons are similar. The reasons are discussed below in order of declining frequency, beginning with "No" responses (see Table 21).

Table 21: Reasons for Not Selecting Course Content
January and May Responses

January		**May**	
Theme	**Frequency**	**Theme**	**Frequency**
Students Do Not Know Enough	50 level - 2 75 level - 6 130 level - 4	Students Do Not Know Enough	50 level - 2; (n=6) 75 level - 8; (n=9) 130 level - 5; (n=10)
Students Would Pick Easy Topics	50 level - 4 75 level - 1 130 level - 1	Students Would Not Agree	50 level - 1 75 level - 2 130 level - 3
Awareness of Need for Long-Range Planning	50 level - 1 75 level - 1 130 level - 2	General Education is Preferable	50 level - 0 75 level - 3 130 level - 2
Course Design Influences Motivation	50 level - 2 75 level - 0 130 level - 1		
Students Already Have Too Much Responsibility	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 0		
Student Input into Method, Not Content	50 level - 0 75 level - 2 130 level - 2	Student Input Into Method, Not Content	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 4

I Would Not Like to Choose Course Content

(i) Students do not know enough. Responses to this question may be grouped into two sub-themes: students' lack of knowledge and instructors' familiarity with curriculum. Albert, for example, said he "did not have a clue about what students should learn in class," and therefore he was "bound to give the wrong opinion." John said, "It is not my job nor my place. I am there to get an education; the instructor's job is to instruct, the rest is up to me."

Those in the intermediate group also felt that instructors were better qualified to select course content. Lucy pointed out: "I've never taken grade ten before, so I don't know what you learn in grade ten." Arthur asked, "If we knew what we were supposed to be learning, why would we be here? Lucy agreed, adding, "Maybe they have found a few things over the years to be more interesting to students as a whole rather than just one or two students." Ed advocated the professional responsibility of instructors: "The teachers are the professionals; they know what they're doing, and I'm here to take it all in."

Those in the senior level also doubted their ability to select appropriate course content. Henry thought, "I didn't really know enough about it at the beginning of the term, and so I don't think my input would have been all that good." Joan said, "I wouldn't have known until the end what content is required for a student to go on to the next level." Rita mentioned that "most people going back have been out of school for a number of years, and if they knew what was to be included, they probably wouldn't have to take the course."

(ii) Students would not agree. Comments here indicate students did not understand techniques by which course content may be modified. Students were concerned they would not be able to agree on the content of the course, which would lead either to disruption or a requirement for more instructors. Joe's comment that determining course content would create "too much argument" was countered by Jim's suggestion that different sections of a course could be designated for different content, such as a composition emphasis versus a literature emphasis.

(iii) General education is preferable. Participants felt that instructors, through their education and curriculum knowledge, design courses which provide a broad general preparation for a variety of higher education programs. This general education is more appropriate, given the lack of education of many upgrading students and their fluid career goals. As Geri pointed out, "In the College Preparatory Program, a lot of people--I've already changed my mind--go into different areas. Unless you're one hundred percent sure what you're going to be taking--I've talked to a lot of people and they're switching." Joe said much the same thing: "The problem is that there are a lot of students who still have no idea where they're going."

The intermediate group became quite animated during this discussion. Arthur said:

> [The instructors] know what they're supposed to be teaching; they don't just decide, "This guy is going to have to know that." There is a level they know you have to know and that's where they draw it. They probably know what you need to know to make it in university.

Nikki felt students should not design the courses, since a general education would offer a broad preparation: "In CPP you can at least have a high school diploma and have something to show for it. Plus at this level, you are still learning the basics that you need everywhere." Maxine added that a narrow, discipline-specific preparation may leave a student with a less adaptable education: "They say adults make three major career choices in their lifetime. You need a broader [education] if you decide to change your career."

Lucy brought up the idea that student input may lead to different levels of preparation, depending on the skill of the adult student in developing his program: "People don't know all the time what they are supposed to learn for their field. If Arthur is in the same field and he chooses better things to be taught, then what do I do? He is better qualified."

(iv) Students involved in method, not content. Students definitely did not want to choose course topics, but three would like to have a say in instructional methods. Max said, "I never thought about having an impact about course content. I would have an opinion in a technique which was being taught, but not an opinion in the content." Joan said, "I wouldn't have known what content is required, but I feel I would have wanted more input in how it's done rather than the content covered."

The time period at which students would like to have discussed instructional techniques varied, but the general feeling was that between two to four weeks into the term would be appropriate. Joan felt that by "about the third or fourth week" the class and instructor would have had time to establish some rapport, that the class would be "accustomed to the instructor's teaching, have had some tests, and [the instructor] would know whether the content is getting through or not." Jim revealed a sense of threat to adults' security and pride when he said at least two weeks would be needed to establish rapport and gain confidence:

> Being scared of being let down or letting yourself down. Maybe asking the question and [receiving the response] 'What are you doing here?' Being unsure of yourself--you look around and you're the oldest one in the classroom. You didn't want to embarrass yourself or look foolish.

I Would Like To Choose Course Content

Affirmative responses may be grouped under the two reasons discussed below, summarized in Table 22.

Table 22: Reasons for Selecting Course Content
January and May Responses

January		May	
Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
(no corresponding theme)		Remove Unessential Information	50 level - 2; (n=6) 75 level - 0; (n=9) 130 level-2; (n=10)
(no corresponding theme)		Adjust Pace or Emphasis of Courses	50 level - 0 75 level - 0 130 level - 3

(i) Remove unessential information. Respondents in both upper and lower level courses would like to have had an influence in course design to remove "unessential content." Geri wondered "why we're taught so many things we're never going to use. There's no way of getting around that, but I guess you have to prove you can think [in the] abstract." For example, she said, "I didn't see what the purpose was of knowing the parliamentary systems of Mexico and Sweden. I didn't see how that was going to be needed in the workforce a year or two down the line." Joan felt that such information could be removed: "I think if there are things that are negligible in future occupations, I would eliminate those. They are a waste of time. We need the absolute basics and confidence in them." Sandy and Bernice felt the college should offer more direct employment preparation, as Sandy said:

> Don't throw me a textbook where I am never going to use this [information]. It's a waste of time and money. Give me something I am going to use. I don't think I needed to know what a prepositional phrase was. If they said they were going to teach us how to write letters, paragraphs, that would be different.

She went on to point out the distinctions between her situation and that of younger students:

> I think by now [over age forty] we know our strengths and weaknesses. I know the things I don't want to do, and what I'm not good at. But I also know some of the things I'm very good at, so let me work on those things. Give us a program at this college that says, "We are going to work with you. These are the courses you need that we have to offer for this field." That's what I feel is needed. You'll have hordes of people coming back.

Bernice summarized her idea of teaching only directly relevant content:

> The [schools should take] all of the courses and all of the fields and make up an educational program for each one of the categories of what they need to know. [Then] just give [students] the basic principles of what they are going to use on the job instead of all the education here. I think you should be able to choose where you are going and then choose your education that goes with that [occupation].

(ii) Adjust pace or emphasis of courses. Students felt they also would like to influence course content to adjust the pace or emphasis of the course. Delma would have liked to adjust a course "if having problems, [you] could learn more about that section by spending more time or placing more emphasis on it." Joan would have removed unessential information, so "more time [could] have been spent on things everyone will use, such as word problems, measurement, solutions, things that were difficult for most students."

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempted to learn the perceptions, as outlined below, of Canadian college preparatory students by surveying a large number of freshman students and by conducting focus group interviews with learners during their first term in a formal learning environment. Of the total number of new CPP students (n=121), 95 were surveyed by questionnaire to obtain demographic and attitudinal information. Of these 95, 33 were interviewed in focus groups. One group of volunteers was recruited from each of three different program levels to obtain a cross-section of learners in the College Preparatory Program. All participants were new to the program, and most were new students to the college. Each group consisted of 10 to 12 participants, with a balance of males and females in each group. One interview session was held after the first week of classes, another just after midterm grades had been posted, and the third three weeks after final exams.

Following the method outlined in Chapter Three, prepared questions were presented, one at a time, to the group, and a fixed time period allotted for discussion. The information was then categorized into the themes and topics presented in Chapter Four.

The information was gathered to answer the research problem "What are the perceptions of freshman college preparatory students regarding themselves, the college, instructional techniques, and effective instruction as they experience their first term of the College Preparatory Program at Red Deer College?" This research problem was addressed by attempting to answer the following sub-problems:

1. What are student perceptions about themselves as learners as the term progresses?
2. What are student perceptions about the college as the term progresses?
3. What are student expectations and preferences regarding instructional techniques?
4. Do student preferences for instructional techniques change over the term?

5. To what extent do student perceptions reflect dependent or independent attitudes toward their studies?

The discussion will address each of the sub-problems in turn. Student responses in general will be discussed first to point out common themes among the three groups. Individual group traits and differences will then be compared, beginning with the basic level group, in a cross-case analysis format.

Conclusions

Student Perceptions About Themselves as Learners

Students experienced considerable stress in adjusting to the people, policies, and rapid instructional pace of the college, but were also optimistic and enthusiastic at the beginning of term. They viewed themselves as largely underprepared in time management and study skills, and were anxious about failure, being older than other students and their ability to fit in. Generally, participants viewed themselves as subordinates in the teaching-learning transaction, and many held stereotypical preconceptions of student-instructor relationships. Students did not want to select or design course content topics.

By March, almost all students expressed increased confidence, motivation, and self-esteem. They felt more comfortable in the college, partly because of acceptance by their instructors and fellow students, and were generally pleased and surprised at being treated as adults by their instructors. They were doing better than expected, and most found learning enjoyable. They were more mature as learners and more self-aware of personal limitations. Although the pace of instruction still caused stress for at least 13 students, many were now better able to work under its pressure.

In May, at least two-thirds of participants in all levels reported increased confidence and comfort with the physical environment, policies, and instructional atmosphere of the college. Students recognized the rapid instructional pace required regular attendance, effective study habits, and hours of homework, an experience much different from the workplace. Students now felt they should take responsibility for their own success, that they are "supposed to be able to think for [them]selves." At least one-third of participants in all three levels reported increased self-esteem.

Participants still felt they would not want to be involved in designing course content, but were now more certain of their reasons, although they would like to have some influence on the instructional techniques used in the classroom.

In general, over the term, students' perceptions of themselves shifted from distressed learners filled with anxiety and uncertainty to students with a more realistic view of their abilities, greater confidence in their learning skills, and optimism regarding their futures. They had moved from wondering "Do I still have 'it' [the capacity to learn]?" to "I know I still have it!"

The preceding discussion treats the student group in general; however, some individual differences among groups should be noted. Although all participants mentioned stress, participants from the 130 level mentioned the greatest number and the highest frequency of stressful situations. The intermediate and senior level groups were most optimistic over having made a positive step in their lives in returning to education, and noted the increase in self-esteem such a step brings.

As well, although students did not wish to design individual course content, half of the students in the basic level group would like to be involved in designing an overall employment-preparation program of studies which would recognize their strengths and "fill in the gaps" of their education. Senior-level participants were acutely conscious of pressure to complete education and return to work. While they were willing to complete instructor-designed courses, they felt their time was wasted taking courses not directly relevant to career goals, or studying content which a quick review enabled them to recall from earlier schooling.

Student Perceptions About the College

The stress of starting classes is reflected in an initial perception of the college as providing insufficient assistance and information. Students would have liked a more detailed orientation to the college environment, more information and assistance during registration, and more information about college policies. By May, however, only the senior-level participants stressed the need for orientation information for new students.

Also, students in January felt the college should provide extensive career information, but by May, career information was not mentioned. Over the term these students' need for information had been satisfied, but new students will probably feel the same initial anxiety and still want career counselling.

At the beginning of term, participants frequently mentioned the need for more tutorial assistance, given the rapid pace of courses. Students mentioned repeatedly that they wished they had known about tutorial help at the beginning of the term. More individual attention and individualized pacing to help students develop study skills, recall previous knowledge, and keep up with current studies were also mentioned in January. Individual pacing would also permit students to complete preparatory courses more quickly to move on to higher education. By May, participants had moved from being anxious about their learning skills to feeling that students had to assume responsibility for their own success. Students' perceptions of the college had changed to feeling that institutional policies and facilities were "comprehensive, accessible, and helpful"; that the college need not do more. Participants now felt that it was the student's responsibility to learn how to use the available services. The college could help students learn to use these services through a better orientation program, they said, which should include a "guided tour" of college services. The registration process, though, was still viewed as a concern; participants felt new students should be assisted through registration.

As with student self-perceptions, perceptions of the college shifted from initial requests for a wide range of services and individual attention to a feeling that the college provided adequate learning support and services, and that it was the student's responsibility to learn about and use those services. This shift may be interpreted as a move from learner dependence to independence.

One notable distinction in group responses was in relation to awareness of time. The intermediate group wanted a registration policy which would allow students to change courses and course levels later in the term than currently permitted by college policy; they felt being in a wrong course or wrong level of a course was a waste of time. As well, in both March and May, students in the basic and senior groups indicated a keen awareness of time pressure. Older students in the basic level felt the college should offer short, direct-employment preparation for those not wanting a general education. These age-conscious students wanted to return to the workforce as quickly as possible. They felt their life experience should be recognized, that the upgrading program should fill the gaps in their knowledge rather than require completion of time-consuming courses that have little relevance to future career plans.

Student Expectations and Preferences Regarding Instructional Techniques

Students expected a version of college much like the stereotypical portrayals seen on television. The image of boring lectures, uncaring instructors with high expectations, and being treated as an adolescent or intellectual inferior caused fear and uncertainty. Students did not expect what they experienced: learning was enjoyable, instructors were personable and helpful, and students were treated as adults.

Students also discussed their preferences in instructional techniques and instructor characteristics. In January, students in all levels preferred techniques which promoted an active student role over those which required a passive role. Small group activities, class discussion, individualized instruction, computer managed learning, and role plays were cited as techniques which enhanced learning. Group activities were rated higher than individualized learning, but a significant number felt individualized methods would better meet the widely differing needs of adult learners, and individual pacing would not tie learners to an instructor-set pace. Little emphasis was placed on practical application of learning.

In March, small-group activity was still the most favoured instructional technique, followed by whole-class activities, such as blackboard work, class discussion, and role playing. In addition, lecture-with-notes was cited as helpful, and to a lesser extent, CML delivery. CML was not helpful when answers were only scored as right or wrong, with no correction of incorrect thinking.

By May, students still felt small-group activities and active participation were the best way to help adults learn, with small group activities mentioned most frequently. However, brief lectures were also seen as useful, particularly when combined with class discussion or group work. As well, three individuals mentioned the value of practical application of learning, compared to only one in January.

Regarding instructor characteristics, in January students felt instructors should promote interaction among learners, indicate important ideas, review earlier topics, and use techniques that appeal to more than one sense. In March, student perception of helpful instructor characteristics had expanded. In addition to the traits mentioned in January, participants felt instructors should treat learners as adults, show a personal interest in student learning, provide for initial student success, indicate important information, and help learners become acquainted with each other.

By May, student perception of helpful instructor characteristics had shifted somewhat. Clear, effective organization, respect for learners, and a willingness to adjust the instructional pace to learners' needs were now mentioned most frequently.

Do Student Preferences for Instructional Techniques Change?

Participants' initial preference for an active student role, through small and large group activities, was maintained through the study. However, some changes in student perceptions did occur. Lectures were seen as not helpful initially, but over the term students recognized their value to introduce a concept, or when used in combination with group activity such as class discussion. As well, by the end of the term the participants were much less enthusiastic about CML instruction.

Students also changed their perception of helpful instructor characteristics. Initially, students favored instructors who pointed out important course concepts, who reviewed course content, and who facilitated group activity. In addition to these, the list of helpful traits was expanded in March to include being treated as adults, showing personal interest in students, and providing for initial success. In May, students added an instructor's ability to clearly organize course content for student comprehension, along with a willingness to adjust the instructional pace to meet learners' needs.

These changes indicate the development of a critical evaluation of instructional skill. Students began the term concentrating on the immediate task of learning course material, indicated by the importance they placed on instructors' emphasis, repetition, and revision. As the term progressed, initial anxiety about meeting course expectations was reduced; they now wanted to be treated as autonomous persons (recognized as adults). They then developed a more objective evaluation of an instructor's ability to organize and present material in a scope, sequence, and pace appropriate for learners. Such a shift indicates a progression from self-centredness to objectivity.

To What Extent Do Student Perceptions Reflect Dependent or Independent Attitudes Toward Their Studies?

An independent attitude toward learning may be characterized by the elements of self-directed learning as described by Knowles (1970). The self-directed learner is one who is involved in planning his education through the stages of diagnosing learning needs, identifying resources for learning, carrying out learning activities, and evaluating learning. The instructor's role is that of "procedural guide" or "content resource." Knowles states that adults need to be treated with respect, that they resist learning which takes place under conditions that do not recognize the adult as an autonomous individual. Many adult learners, as Knowles points out, enter formal learning situations in a dependent attitude because pedagogical instruction has developed and encouraged that attitude. Although many adults are autonomous in their daily lives, they bring a dependent attitude to formal learning which encourages the instructor to treat students as dependent (p. 39 - 44).

The findings of this study indicate that college preparatory students are not independent learners, as described in the literature, for they do not meet all the characteristics of self-directedness. However, for this study, dependent or independent attitudes are related to participants' age, educational background, or educational objectives. In each group, some elements of a positive attitude to independence can be found. Each group is discussed separately below.

50-level group. The 50-level group reflected the findings of Boud (1987), mentioned in Chapter Two, that adults who have been away from formal learning for a lengthy period may want to prove they are capable of studying again, a need which surpasses acquiring content knowledge. Participants in this group had been away from formal learning from 9 to 38 years. In January, these students reported a high level of stress, much of which was related to uncertainty of learning ability. Adjusting to an academic environment, which includes renewing study skills, adjusting to the pace of instruction, and concern about performance, was the most frequently mentioned stressor. In addition, the most highly rated helpful instructional techniques included small group activity, class discussion, and appealing to more than one sense, all means by which learners may increase their likelihood of success. These learners stressed the importance of talking with others to help them understand and retain information. Demonstrating an ability to study is indeed important for these students at the beginning of the term.

In March, concern about keeping up with the instructor's pace was still indicated in students' comments regarding the rapid instructional pace and feeling overwhelmed. These comments were now countered by an emerging sense of achievement and competence evidenced by better-than-anticipated performance and increased self-awareness. Respondents still rated active learner roles as most effective for their learning, along with instructors who indicate significant content and who provide straightforward "point-by-point" explanations of concepts.

By May, when the group had shrunk from 11 to 6, most students were more confident and comfortable in the college, and some noted increased self-esteem, compared to January. If one assumes that people tend to discuss most readily issues which are uppermost in their minds, as occurred in the two preceding rounds, participants in this group, by lack of mention of stressors, no longer felt the stress which characterized the beginning of the term.

The participants in May were evenly split into a group under 30 years of age and a group over 40. The younger group were seeking certification for either a Grade 12 diploma or entrance to college programs. These younger students were willing to complete a general education program, and were not concerned about immediate application of their learning. As Debbie said, "Whether the information is used later doesn't matter. I have to know all courses to get where I want to go." These students' responses would support Pratt's (1988) and Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) assertion that basic education students or students attempting to meet external criteria may be unprepared or unwilling to be self-directing in their education.

On the other hand, at least half the group found the return to college "tough, stressful, and disappointing." Participants over 40 felt pressured by time and desired to return to work as soon as possible. These three resented the time away from their families required to keep up with coursework. They also resented the requirement to complete general education courses rather than employment-specific training. Their resentment was based partly on the fact that neither their previous life experiences nor their individual strengths were recognized in designing their program of studies. These participants would support Knowles' assumptions that adult learners move away from future application of learning to immediate application, from subject-centred learning to performance-centred learning, and from dependence to self-direction. Sandy, for example, said, "Give me something I'm going to use, not something I'm not going to use and waste my time and energy." Bernice would rather learn to write letters than study grammar, and felt,

> If you tell me I have to learn this to get this course, and in a year's time I'm going to get a job, yes, I'm going to do it, because I know that is why I'm learning. But I don't know why I'm doing science and other [general] courses.

Rather than select topics in individual courses, these older participants would rather be involved in creating a "career total educational plan" that recognized their strengths and "filled in the gaps" in their knowledge in preparation for an occupation. In this regard, these students express a preference for self-direction; however, the pedagogical structure of the College Preparatory Program is not supportive of such an approach.

75-level group. The experience of this intermediate group was generally similar to that of the basic level group, except for the following points. In January, these participants were notably concerned about being treated with respect by the Registrar's and instructional staff. These participants were also most highly in favor of individualized instruction, a process which would offer the possibility for a collaborative approach to identifying learning needs. They felt they did not know enough to design their own learning, but would like to have some influence regarding instruction techniques.

In March this group mentioned most frequently that treating learners as adults and showing a personal interest in learners were traits of a helpful instructor. These two traits are also part of Knowles' andragogical approach to learning described above.

In May, the intermediate group almost unanimously declined to design course content, partly because they felt they did not know enough to do so and would be unable to agree on course content. However, students were not so much averse to designing their own learning program as they were apprehensive about selecting inappropriate or irrelevant content, and did not want an inferior education. However, the group's preference for active roles and desire for being treated as adults may indicate an independent attitude toward their studies.

130-level group. Students in this group were most articulate in expressing their feelings of stress in January, and did so with the highest frequency. Of the three groups, these participants were most concerned about being successful in their studies, were most optimistic about their return to school, and were most desirous of counselling information. As with the other two groups, these students found learning support services useful, and felt active student roles facilitated their learning.

They did not want to choose course content, feeling they lacked sufficient knowledge to do so. Students were concerned they would be inadequately prepared for future learning if they were to design their own courses.

By March, students were still concerned about success, indicated in their preference for active learner roles. A sense of emerging independence and confidence, however, was indicated in their desire to be treated as adults.

Concern about success was continued in May. Participants showed a nearly unanimous preference for small group activity, which they found facilitated their learning. As well, students approved of instructors who adjusted the instructional pace to suit learners' needs, another factor enhancing learner success.

This group still preferred not to design course content, partly because students did not know enough, and partly because students would be unable to agree on content. As with the intermediate group, participants felt a general education designed by instructors offered a better preparation for future education. However, this preference did not indicate a passive attitude; students would still like some influence over instructional methods to affect how they are taught.

Students in this group usually have only one or two terms of upgrading to gain prerequisite courses for university and college programs, and therefore seem more concerned with passing their courses and having made the right career/education choice. Their willingness to permit instructors to design courses supports Pratt's and Caffarella's situational dependency view of adult learners. On the other hand, students' preference for active learning roles and to be treated as adults indicates elements of self-directedness.

Relevance to Theory

This study supports the view of adult learners who are mostly dependent in their learning. According to the literature on this topic, dependency is a product of the interplay of characteristics relating to the adult learner, the learning context, and the instructor (Pratt, 1988, p. 162).

This view is consistent with Knowles' revised discussion of andragogy and pedagogy. Knowles (1984) no longer argues the dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy as opposing philosophies, but now sees andragogy as a model which includes pedagogical assumptions about the learner. Pedagogy, however, still excludes andragogical assumptions about the learner (p. 162). In fact, Knowles acknowledges that at times adults may benefit from a pedagogical approach to learning, an agreement with the situational dependency position of Brookfield (1992), Pratt (1988), Merriam and Caffarella (1991), and others.

The situations Knowles (1984) describes under which dependency may be more beneficial for the learner apply to the participants in this study:

> When learners . . . have in fact had no previous experience with a content area, when they do need to accumulate a given body of subject matter in order to accomplish a required performance, . . . then they need to be taught by the pedagogical model. (p. 62)

Participants in this study would include themselves among those who have little previous knowledge of a discipline. Students maintained throughout the study that they lacked knowledge of the academic discipline necessary to design their own learning.

They also stated a preference for a set program of studies to ensure an acceptable standard of education as preparation for higher education, a situational variable Pratt (1988) cites in support of learner dependency. The majority of students surveyed indicated their reasons for taking CPP courses were for either entrance to employment or further education (see Chart 2, p. 42), and therefore they may willingly accept an established curriculum as the most efficient means to meet such entrance requirements. Participants also face time constraints to complete their education as quickly as possible and must meet externally set standards of performance, two additional situational factors which indicate dependency as a preferred approach to learning. Furthermore, students felt subordinate in the learning process, and thus lacked the sense of control over that process which leads to the learner's willingness to accept responsibility for learning (Garrison, 1992, p. 143).

The third factor which encourages learner dependency is a pedagogical instructional milieu. In this study, participants' previous education was primarily pedagogical in orientation, and most instruction they encountered in CPP also followed that orientation;

consequently, little training or experience in self-directed learning was provided. Instructional methods in CPP, as pointed out in the Program Review (1990), are largely based on a pedagogical philosophy. Students must adapt to the instructional methods used in CPP, and generally do so willingly to gain the appropriate educational accreditation as a basis for further studies. This environment does not encourage self-directedness; in fact, the program's emphasis on pre-planned, instructor-paced courses is based on learner dependence.

The study did find some indications, however, that learners may have some disposition toward developing learner independence. For example, students' preference for an active learner role, for being treated as adults, and for input regarding instructional methods, all part of an andragogical methodology, may imply a disposition for self-directedness, given appropriate training and a supportive environment.

Students' objective of gaining an appropriate education as a basis for further study rationalizes the learner's willingness to surrender self-directedness when seeking formal certification, but such a choice does not necessarily imply inability for self-directedness. Although these participants do not wish to be involved in planning their own learning, their preference to be treated in ways concurrent with andragogical practice indicates their dependence may be attributed to personal choice as well as the pedagogical method used in the College Preparatory Program. That nearly one-third of the participants favored some form of individualized instruction at the beginning of the study (see Table 9) indicates some preference for independence. By the end of their first term, however, most students in the study had successfully adjusted to the instructional techniques used in the College Preparatory Program, and made little mention of any form of individualized instruction or self-directed learning.

As Knowles (1980) has pointed out, adults usually are not prepared for self-directed learning, and must be trained to use independent learning methods. Adults often enter formal learning in a dependent attitude, developed in earlier education, and this attitude encourages instructors to continue treating adult learners as dependent (p. 56). Participants in this study are much like adult learners described in the literature, and they experience the same anxieties as other learners in their return to formal learning. Adult educators should be aware of the influence of learner and institutional attributes on the learner's preference for and ability to engage in self-directed learning.

Recommendations

These recommendations are relevant to the College Preparatory Program, to adult education in general, and to further research.

Recommendations for the College Preparatory Program

1. CPP should reexamine its philosophy and mission statement in light of student preferences for learning activities. The philosophy statement declares a commitment to the "principles and practices of adult education"; however, the Program Review determined that most instruction in CPP conforms to the instructor-paced pedagogical model. This study indicates students would like more influence over instructional techniques, and prefer an active approach to learning. CPP should clarify what it means by the "principles and practices of adult education."

2. Educators of adults should be aware of the changing nature of students' expectations and alter their instructional style accordingly. At the beginning of the term, instructors should provide considerable direction regarding importance of content and studying techniques. Activities and assignments should be structured for initial learner success, but also to encourage and permit growing student autonomy as the term progresses. Independence may be fostered via more open-ended activities such as projects, essay-question evaluations, and a range of options in course assignments.

3. In light of the number of comments at the beginning of the term in favor of some form of individual instruction, CPP should examine the feasibility of implementing a pilot project based on individualized or competency-based instruction.

4. This study implies that many adults may be ready for self-directed learning, but that the college environment and/or lack of training in self-directed learning methods may inhibit such learning. Educators who wish to foster an independent approach to learning should develop a training program which would prepare learners to conduct an independent learning project.

5. Students in the study report the value of peer tutoring, a technique recommended in numerous study skills textbooks. Returning adult students may be unaware of the benefits of peer tutoring, or hesitant to create a peer tutoring group. CPP should implement the creation of such peer groups as part of course design. Such implementaion may be only the initial formation of groups and advice on group study techniques, or may extend to group tests, group presentations, and group projects throughout the term.

6. Returning adult learners have a great need for information, particularly at the beginning of their program of studies. Students may enter upgrading programs with a particular career objective in mind, but often change their objective as their education and awareness expand. The student information and counselling department of the college should provide workshops or information packages to present, in a more direct fashion, information regarding college learning support services, sources of financial support, and in particular, occupation descriptions and education requirements. As well, new students' desire for information at the beginning of a course may serve as the basis for initial assignments or workshops.

7. A benefit mentioned by participants in the study was an opportunity to learn that others shared their anxieties and concerns, that hearing of others' concerns was comforting. CPP should provide a forum for new learners to discuss and share their anxieties, thereby assisting learners in making the transition to formal learning. Supporting a Mature Students' Society may be one such method.

8. CPP should reevaluate the student orientation sessions to determine their effectiveness in meeting student needs. A survey or focus group method could be used to determine what students would like to learn from the orientation, the extent to which the present orientation meets those needs, and revise the activity accordingly.

9. CPP and Red Deer College should undertake a public relations campaign to portray its faculty and programs as they actually are as a means to counter negative preconceptions of the college, such as those stated by participants in the study. Although students do enroll in spite of these preconceptions, such a campaign may reduce first-time students' stress and may recruit more learners to the college.

10. The college should evaluate the efficiency and friendliness of its service to first-time visitors and potential clients, who are often intimidated by the college environment. For example, students in this study were concerned about the complexity and length of registration. The registration process has since been modified for greater simplicity and efficiency, and the participants report, informally, that the process is now much improved.

11. Researchers who undertake a qualitative research project must be flexible and adaptable in matching the data gathering technique to the client group. For example, in spite of the pilot project evidence that Nominal Group Technique was an effective means to gather information, it did not suit the participants, and was replaced by a focus group approach. Such adaptation may have to be carried out very quickly.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study was designed to obtain students' perceptions as the term progressed and so presents "snapshots" of student culture

over the term. It did not rigorously monitor any change of the same attitudes over the term. The broad range of data suggests several possible follow-up studies. One study could use a focus group technique to identify students' perceptions of helpful instructional techniques and instructor characteristics at the beginning of term. These techniques and characteristics could then be organized into a rating scale and administered to students near the beginning and end of term, using a five-point Likert scale or similar technique to determine any change in perceptions. Another variation would be to summarize student responses after the first round of interviews and present to students these responses at subsequent interviews for reaction. Such an approach would offer an opportunity to directly monitor changes in student attitudes.

2. This study should be repeated using only two interview rounds, one at the beginning and a second approximately two weeks from the end of term. Students' responses during Round Three in May were briefer and more general than in the two preceding rounds. The third round occurred after classes had ended, a time when the respondents' attention seemed less focussed and their attitudes were more relaxed and cavalier than during the term. As well, the repetition of the interview questions may have led to a negative attitude toward the project which may account for the reduced discussion in May. A third issue was the difficulty of interviewing participants once the term had ended, for a number of participants were working shiftwork or in locations which prevented even telephone interviews. The number of individual and telephone interviews required to contact participants in May changed the dynamics of the focus group process used in the two earlier rounds and affected the nature and quantity of data provided.

3. This study could be replicated with individual interviews of students to compare the nature and quantity of information gathered by group versus individual interview methods.

4. A project which trains college preparatory level students to become involved in identifying learning needs, identifying resources for learning, carrying out learning activities, and evaluating learning should be carried out in a formal learning environment. Such a project would identify if the environment or the learners were the inhibiting factor in promoting self-directedness.

5. A study could examine the correlation between student perceptions of themselves and the instructional milieu and the students' final grades to discover any relationship between perceptions and performance.

6. The Learning Log record used as a supplement in this study could serve as the basis of a study on its own. With some modification to the questions, and by making the log a requirement of the study, student perceptions of themselves as learners over the academic term could be gathered and analyzed. Such a study would be open-ended and may provide considerable unexpected revelations about adult learning in a formal setting.

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Appendix A
Permission to Conduct Research

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 11, 1991

Mr. Tom Gwin
Apartment 3
8544 - 84th Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6C 1C9

Dear Mr. Gwin:

In response to your letter of December 10 and request to conduct a research study at Red Deer College in the College Preparatory Program beginning in January, 1992, I hereby approve your request with the understanding that the release of confidential information concerning the students involved in the 'focus group' will be undertaken by the Faculty within that Program. Approval of this request is also contingent upon the approval by the Dean, Mr. Gerry Paradis, and by the Chairperson, Mrs. Donna Storvik.

I am pleased to hear that you have completed your course requirements and are set to begin data collection for your thesis.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Dr. Edward J. Luterbach,
President

cc: Mr. Don Snow
Mr. Gerry Paradis
Mrs. Donna Storvik

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Appendix B
CPP Research Project Information Sheet

What is the study about?

The study is to learn about three things: how adult students see themselves as learners; what they think about the college; and how they feel about various instructional techniques. The study is part of the requirements for a master's degree in adult education at the University of Alberta.

What do I need to be part of the study?

No special training or experience is needed. Just being a new student in the college and being willing to talk about your experiences are sufficient.

How much time will it take?

About a total of six hours. Sessions will be held in early January, late March, and early May. Each session will be one and a half or two hours and will be scheduled to fit your timetable. Coffee, juice, and refreshments will be provided. If you will be unable to meet in May, you could still be a participant - the first two sessions are important ones, too. As part of the discussion content, you are asked to note your experiences as a learner through the term.

Are there any risks involved?

Not really. Whatever you say will remain anonymous; names of participants will not be reported. Furthermore, you need not answer any question you prefer not to, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

What will I get out of it?

Your participation will help both me and the college learn more about adult learners, but you also will gain by being a part of the study. You will learn you are not alone in the hectic and challenging role of an adult student. You will gain a new awareness of yourself as a learner. You may become a more analytical thinker. Finally, sharing in university research will be unique -- you will receive a summary of the findings, if you wish, when the study is completed. I think you will find participating both interesting and beneficial; *it might even be fun!*

How can I learn more?

Further details will be discussed at the first meeting.

How do I sign up?

Please complete the attached form, and return it to me in person or through the CPP Chairperson in Room 2510. You will be contacted once a meeting time has been finalized.

I look forward to hearing your contributions. Thank you.

Tom Gwin

Appendix C

CPP RESEARCH STUDY
Participant Agreement Form

This study is being undertaken by Tom Gwin as part of his M.Ed. program at the University of Alberta. The study is supported by Red Deer College, where Mr. Gwin is employed as an instructor in the College Preparatory Program. The purpose of the study is to learn about three things: how adult students see themselves as learners; what they think about the college; and how they feel about instructional techniques.

Information will be gathered from a group of students who are full-time freshmen college preparatory students registered in the Winter 1992 term.

Names of participants will not be reported. Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time. If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete and sign the form as indicated below.

Name: ____________________________________

Address:

____

____

Postal Code ______________

Home Telephone: ______________

If unable to contact, leave a message at: ___________

Signed ______________________

Date ______________________

Please return to: Tom Gwin, C/O CPP Chairperson, Room 2510, Red Deer College. **Thank you!**

Appendix D
New Student Questionnaire

CPP RESEARCH PROJECT
NEW STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Information

This questionnaire is part of a study is being undertaken by Tom Gwin as part of his M.Ed. program at the University of Alberta. This questionnaire is designed to gather information about adult students new to the college. The information you provide is valuable in understanding adult learners, and I appreciate your cooperation in completing this survey.

The purpose of the larger study is to learn about three things: how adult students see themselves as learners; what they think about the college; and how they feel about instructional techniques. The study is supported by Red Deer College, where Mr. Gwin is employed as an instructor in the College Preparatory Program.

Information will be gathered from full-time freshmen college preparatory students registered in the Winter 1992 term at Red Deer College. The information will be confidential, and those who complete the questionnaire will remain anonymous. The form is not coded in any way to identify you as a participant.

Completion of this questionnaire is voluntary, but the information you provide will help to develop a profile of those who have enrolled in the College Preparatory Program in the Winter 1992 term. Thank you for your help in this research project.

Tom Gwin

ADULT EDUCATION SURVEY
NEW STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER

Please answer by circling the number beside your choice or writing in the space provided.

Please do not write in this space

1. Where did you you live before coming to Red Deer College?

Within Red Deer city/ county	1	1
Outside Red Deer city/ county, but within Alberta	2	
Outside Alberta but within Canada	3	
Outside Canada	4	

2. Are you a:

Full-time student	1	2
Part-time student	2	

3. Are you:

male	1	3
female	2	

4. What is your age group?

under 18	1	4
18 - 24	2	
25 - 30	3	
31 - 40	4	
41 - 50	5	
over 50	6	

5. Are you:

single/divorced/separated, no dependents	1	5
single/divorced/separated, with dependents	2	
married, no children	3	
married with children	4	

6. What is the highest level of schooling you have taken?

(Circle ONE only)

		Do not write here
less than grade 8	1	6
Grade 8 -10	2	
Grade 11	3	
Grade 12	4	
some postsecondary education	5	

7. What certificates/diplomas have you received?

(Please circle all that apply)

High school diploma	1	7
Trades/journeyman certificate	1	8
Other technical or vocational certificate	1	9
College diploma	1	10
University degree	1	11

8. Which of the following have you taken? (Circle all that apply)

English as a Second Language (ESL)	1	12
Adult Basic Education (ABE)	1	13
Lifeskills Training	1	14
Academic Upgrading beyond Gr. 8	1	15

9. Why are you taking College Preparatory Program courses?

(Please circle all that apply)

Personal interest	1	16
To meet qualifications for trade/ technical school	1	17
To qualify for another educational program	1	18
To complete high school for employment reasons	1	19
Required to do so by an agency	1	20
To update/refresh education	1	21
To raise my marks	1	22
Other (specify): ______________	1	23

10. How do you plan to support your education? (Circle all that apply)

Personal savings	1	24
A.V.T	1	25
Canada Manpower	1	26
Student loan	1	27
Working part-time	1	28
Full-time employment	1	29
Social Services (Welfare)	1	30
Family support	1	31
Other (specify): ____________	1	32

10. If you are planning to work in paid employment, how many hours **per week** will you work? ______ hours per week.	33,34
11. If you have dependents, how many hours **per week** do you spend on the care and maintenance of your family? _____ hrs. per wk.	35,36

12. As a student new to the college, what do you think will be major adjustments for you? (Please circle all that apply)

Making new friends	1	37
Getting to know the instructors	1	38
Adjusting to doing homework at nights and on weekends	1	39
Becoming involved in college activities such as clubs, sports, social functions	1	40
Having my family adjust to the new demands on my time	1	41
Being able to ask instructors for help	1	42
Having someone evaluate my learning	1	43
Managing my time	1	44
Other (specify): ____________________	1	45

Thank you for your help with this research. Please leave the questionnaire with the instructor, or return it to the CPP chairperson in Room 2510.

Appendix E
Interview Guide
Session One

A. Introductions and opening comments:

1. Remind participants their responses will be kept confidential, that they need not answer if they would rather not, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

2. Explain my stance as being neutral in relation to their comments. I will not approve or disapprove of their statements, but will only try to understand what they are saying, so do not be discouraged by my neutrality.

3. Explain my role as moderator and inquirer, and that my questions may take a variety of forms, including hypothetical questions, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions.

4. Reinforce the idea that whatever they say, provided it is on topic and sincere, is valuable and relevant information. There are no right or wrong answers in this study. Each of them were chosen to be representative of the student body. Their contributions are important, and therefore they may expect me to prompt them to participate.

5. Have students use only their first name or a "nick name" by which they will be identified in the discussions and in the write-up of the study.

6. Remind students to address each other by the name chosen by each person, and not to name instructors specifically, but rather mention them by the subject they teach, e.g. "my math teacher...."

B. Speak generally about the project and its purposes.
   - Use of focus groups and nominal group technique
   - Purpose is to learn student perceptions of their educational experience with a view to reviewing instructional methods and department policies.

C. Review agenda for project and meetings in detail.
   Meetings in January, late March, and early May.

Turn on Tape Recorder

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Think back to when you decided to come to this program. How did you feel about returning to school as an adult?

   The following question may elicit responses related to #3.

2. What do you think the college could do, by way of services and facilities, to support you as a learner? What helped you to feel comfortable? What made you feel uncomfortable?

   NOTE: This question may require guidance to responses relating to facilities (Registrar's office, Counselling, Academic Advisement, Bookstore, etc,) or instructional approach (the way an instructor asks learners to interact with the subject matter and with each other).
   Responses related to personal life are also anticipated.

3. What instructional techniques (eg. small group activities, lectures, demonstrations, role play, etc.) do you think should be used to help adults learn?
   What type of atmosphere should an instructor create or promote in the classroom?
   In what type of classroom atmosphere do you think adults learn best?
   How would you prefer to be taught once you begin your courses?
   Would you expect all classes to be taught using similar methods?

4. As a learner, would you want to be consulted about what should be included in the content of a course?
   Do you think adult learners should help to determine the course content in any of their courses?
   Could you give some reasons for your answering yes or no to the previous question?

Interview Guide
Session Two
March, 1992

1. Introductions and opening comments:

Remind participants their responses will be kept confiden-tial, that they need not answer if they would rather not, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

Explain my stance as being neutral in relation to their comments. I will not approve or disapprove of their statements, but will only try to understand what they are saying, and not to be discouraged by my neutrality.

Explain my role as moderator and inquirer, and that my questions may take a variety of forms .

Reinforce the idea that whatever they say, provided it is on topic and sincere, is valuable and relevant information. There are no right or wrong answers in this study. Each of them was chosen to be representative of the student body. Their contributions are important, and therefore they may expect me to prompt them to participate.

Have students use only their first name or a "nick name" by which they will be identified in the discussions and in the write-up of the study.

Remind students to address each other by the name chosen by each person, and not to name instructors specifically, but rather mention them by the subject they teach, e.g. "my math teacher...."

2. Review purposes of the project and the importance of their honesty in answering the questions. Caution students against being unduly influenced by another's opinions, and to use the observations recorded in their journals as a reference for their comments.

3. Review agenda for project and this session.

Turn on Tape Recorder

Discussion Questions

Please refer to your learning journals to refresh your memory about your experiences over the past few weeks before answering the following questions. You might find it helpful to jot down a few notes before we begin our discussion. Use the back of this page if you wish.

In order to give everyone a chance to speak, we will move around the group in turn. However, if you have something to contribute to what someone else has said, please do so. Please try to speak one at a time so the comments will be clear on the tape recorder.

1. What were the high points and low points of the current term? What made them either high or low points? What images, words, or metaphors would you use to describe your college experience so far?

2. Please describe the instructional methods which you found got in the way of your learning. Please try to give specific examples. Methods of instruction may include group presentations, class discussions, lectures, small group activities, computer assisted instruction, etc.

3. Which instructional methods have you found most helpful in your learning? Please try to give specific examples. Why do you prefer these techniques?

4. Do you note any changes in your expectations of what good instruction consists?

Announcement:

Please note that a third session, a very important session for the study, is scheduled in early May. Would you be able to meet as part of this group during the week of May 4 to 8? Would the college be a suitable location for you?

I also would like to remind you that you may have a final say in this project by sending me a written comment, by the end of May, about your learning experience. This should be sent to me either in Edmonton or through the college.

Round Three
Interview Guide

1. Introductions and opening comments:

Remind participants their responses will be kept confiden-tial, that they need not answer if they would rather not, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

Explain my stance as being neutral in relation to their comments. I will not approve or disapprove of their statements, but will only try to understand what they are saying, and not to be discouraged by my neutrality.

Explain my role as moderator and inquirer, and that my questions may take a variety of forms .

Reinforce the idea that whatever they say, provided it is on topic and sincere, is valuable and relevant information. There are no right or wrong answers in this study. Each of them was chosen to be representative of the student body. Their contributions are important, and therefore they may expect me to prompt them to participate.

Have students use only their first name or a "nick name" by which they will be identified in the discussions and in the write-up of the study.

Remind students to address each other by the name chosen by each person, and not to name instructors specifically, but rather mention them by the subject they teach, e.g. "my math teacher...."

2. Review purposes of the project and the importance of their honesty in answering the questions. Caution students against being unduly influenced by another's opinions, and to use the observations recorded in their journals as a reference for their comments.

Questions

1. Now that you have completed the first term, how do you now feel about being an adult returning to school?
2. Now that you have completed the first term of your program, what do you feel the college should provide in the way of policies, facilities, and services to support you as a learner? What changes would you like to see implemented to assist you as an adult learner?
3. What instructional techniques (eg. small group activities, lectures, demonstrations, role play, etc.) do you now think should be used to help adults learn? Did any methods seem more appropriate in different courses? Have any methods been particularly unhelpful for you as a learner?
4. How have your ideas about appropriate instructional techniques changed over the term? What has caused the change in your perceptions of instructional methods?
5. Now that you have completed this term, would you have liked to have been involved, at the beginning of the term, in deciding what should be taught in the courses? Why or why not?

Appendix F
*Learning Log

Please maintain this log on a bi-weekly basis throughout your first term of study. As a participant in this research project, your perceptions of your learning experience are central to the research.

Think back over the past two weeks and consider how you felt as a learner. Please describe as specifically and concretely as you can how you felt in regard to the questions below. Point form is just fine. Use the back of the sheet if you need more room. Remember that this information is for your use only.

1. Did anything significant happen to you as a learner? Please describe the incident and how you felt.

Week 1 & 2____

Week 3 & 4____

Week 5 & 6 ____

Week 7 & 8 ____

Week 9 & 10 ____

Week 10 & 11____

Week 12 & 13 ____

Week 14 ____

2. Did anything happen which was a "low point" as a learning experience? What was it about the experience that made it a low point?

Week 1 & 2____

Week 3 & 4 ____

Week 5 & 6 ____

Week 7 & 8 ____

Week 9 & 10 ____

2, continued: Did anything happen which was a "low point" as a learning experience? What was it about the experience that made it a low point?

Week 10 & 11 ____

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Week 12 & 13 ____

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Week 14 ____

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3. Did anything happen which was a "high point" as a learning experience? What was it about the experience that made it a high point?

Week 1 & 2____

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Week 3 & 4 ____

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Week 5 & 6 ____

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Week 7 & 8 ____

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Week 9 & 10 ____

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Week 10 & 11 ____

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Week 12 & 13____

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Week 14 ____

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4. Please describe the characteristics and behaviors of teachers which you found most helpful in your learning? Please try to give specific examples.

Week 1 & 2____

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Week 3 & 4 ____

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Week 5 & 6 ____

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Week 7 & 8____

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Week 9 & 10 ____

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Week 10 & 11 ____

4, continued: Please describe the characteristics and behaviors of teachers which you found most helpful in your learning? Please try to give specific examples.

Week 12 & 13 ______________________________

Week 14 ______________________________

5 Please describe the characteristics and behaviors of teachers which you found got in the way of your learning. Again, please try to give specific examples.

Week 1 & 2______________________________

Week 3 & 4 ______________________________

Week 5 & 6 ______________________________

Week 7 & 8 ______________________________

Week 9 & 10 ______________________________

Week 10 & 11 ______________________________

Week 12 & 13 ______________________________

Week 14 ______________________________

6. Please describe any insights you had about yourself as a learner.

Week 1 & 2______________________________

Week 3 & 4 ______________________________

Week 5 & 6 ______________________________

Week 7 & 8 ______________________________

Week 9 & 10 ______________________________

Week 10 & 11 ______________________________

Week 12 & 13 ______________________________

Week 14 ______________________________